THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

NOW 35c MARCH

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

I'll Show You My Tarn
by HUGH WALPOLE

The Strangled Witness
by LESLIE FORD

The Coming of Mr. Quin
by AGATHA CHRISTIE

Bullets, Back to Back
by FRANK KANE

The Fountain Plays
by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

THE PEARLS OF PEACE

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

BEING of no mind to get myself in the middle of a feminine free-for-all, I have mulled over this gambit with the brain-splitting intensity of a diplomat studying the fine print in a world-shaking treaty. And this is the masterpiece I come up with:

"In any list of the six top women writers of mysteries, it would be almost impossible not to include the names of Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, and Leslie Ford."

This very neatly leaves no less than three blank spaces in which any ladies who feel that they are just as good as, or better than, the aforesaid can write their own names; and if there should happen to be four of them who want to squabble over the vacant places, I should be able to make my getaway in the ensuing confusion.

Meanwhile, we are proud to present the three we have mentioned, all in this one issue: Dorothy with THE FOUNTAIN PLAYS, Agatha with THE COMING OF MR. QUIN, and Leslie (yes, that one is a female) with a novelet of the famous Colonel Primrose, THE STRANGLED WITNESS.

But don't let this make anyone think that this magazine has surrendered completely to the gentler (who the hell said *that?*) sex. I merely put them at the head of the line as a matter of conventional courtesy. The other nine stories of our round dozen are all by good trousered crime-cookers.

I suppose that Sir Hugh Walpole, being a Knight, is entitled by strict protocol to lead the men with his very literate I'LL SHOW YOU MY TARN.

Then there might be a little mild elbowing between two gentlemen of similar surname, George Harmon Coxe with THE PAINTED NAIL, and William R. Cox claiming precedence with a brand-new story NO STARS IN MY CROWN. And Frank Kane, also with a brand-new story of his famous sleuth Johnny Liddell, BULLETS BACK TO BACK, might well be in there shoving.

At least I know the only safe place to put myself in this line-up, and that, as traditional (and entirely false) modesty requires, is last. The new Saint story this time, THE PEARLS OF PEACE, I think is rather nicely non-formula. But I'd better not give it any more build-up, or the whole mob, guys and dolls, may be on my neck.

Seems to me what we need in this department is an offspring of Emily Post by Dale Carnegie.

Leslie Charteris

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the pearls of peace

by . . . Leslie Charteris

In a town of smelly hovels Simon Templar found the loveliest and the ugliest pearl in the world.

BEFORE THE IDEA becomes too firmly established that Simon Templar (or, as it usually seems easier to call him, the Saint) never bothered to steal anything of which the value could be expressed in less than six figures, I want to tell here the story of the most trivial robbery he ever committed.

The popular conception of the meanest theft that can be committed is epitomized in the cliché, "stealing pennies from a blind man." Yet that, almost literally, is what the Saint once did. And he is perhaps prouder of that theft than of any other larceny in a list which long ago assumed the dimensions of an epic.

The Saint has been called by quite a thesaurus of romantic names, of which "The Robin Hood of Modern Crime" and "The Twentieth Century's Brightest Buccaneer" are probably the hardest worked. By public officials obligated to restrain his self-appointed and self-administered kind of justice, and by malefactors upon whom it had been exercized, he was described by an even more definitive glossary of terms which cannot be quoted in a publication available

An historical spot in Old Mexico is the background of this new story in which The Saint commits the meanest larceny of his career—and proudly.

to the palpitating general public.

To himself Simon Templar was an adventurer born in the wrong age, a cavalier cheated out of his sword, a pirate robbed of his black flag, with a few inconvenient ideals which had changed over the years in detail but never in principle.

But by whatever adjectives you choose to delineate him, and with whatever you care to make of his motives, the sober arithmetical record certainly makes the Saint, statistically, one of the greatest robbers of all time. Estimates of the total loot which at one time or another passed through his hands, as made by mathematically-minded students of these stories, vary in their net amount. His expenses were always high, and his interpretation of a tithe to charity invariably generous. But by any system of calculation, they run rather comfortably into the millions.

Such a result should surprise nobody. Simon Templar liked big adventures, and in big affairs there is usually big money involved, this being the sordid state of incentives in our day and age.

But the Saint's greatness was that he could be just as interested in small matters when they seemed big enough to him. And that is what the incident I am referring to was about.

This happened around the town of La Paz, which in Spanish means only "Peace."

II

La Paz lies near the southern tip of the peninsula of Baja California—"Lower California" in English—a long, narrow leg of land which stretches down from the southern border of California and the United States. Due to the peculiarly ineradicable obsession of American statesmen with abstract lines of latitude and longitude as boundaries, instead of more intelligible geographic or ideographic frontiers, which accepted the ridiculous 38th-parallel partition of Korea as naturally as the quaint geometrical shape of most American state lines, this protuberance was blandly excluded from the deal which brought California into the United States, although topographically it is as obviously a proper part of California as its name implies. There is in technical fact a link of dry land south of the border connecting Baja California with the mainland of Mexico, but there is no practical transportation across it, no civilized way from one to the other without passing through the United States. For all the rest of its length, the Gulf of Lower California, or the Sea of Cortez as the Mexicans know it, thrusts a hundred miles and more of deep water between the two.

Thus, like an almost amputated limb, Baja California hangs in the edge of the Pacific, bound to Mexico by nationality, to California by what terrestrial liga-

ments it has, nourished by neither and an anomaly to both. The highway artery leaps boldly across to Tijuana and contrives to keep going south to Ensenada, bearing a fair flow of tourist blood; but then almost at once it is a mere dusty trickle of an almost impassable road, navigable only to rugged venturers in jeeps, which meanders through scorched and barren waste lands for hundreds of empty miles to La Paz, the end of the line.

La Paz is a port of long defunct importance, seeming to survive mainly because its inhabitants have nowhere else to go. But that was not always true. Here, in its fine natural harbor, toplofty Spanish galleons once came to anchor, and bearded soldier-monks peered hungrily at the rocky shore, eager to convert the heathen with *pax vobiscums* or bonfires, but with some leaning towards the latter, always with an eye to the mundane treasures that could be heisted from the pagans in exchange for a sizzling dose of salvation.

But the gold of that region, though it was there and is still there, was too hard to extract for their voracious appetite, and they sailed on towards the richer promise to the north. Others, however, who came later and stayed, discovered treasure of another kind under the pellucid warm blue waters near by. Once upon a time the pearl fisheries of La Paz were world famous, far surpassing the product of the South Pacific oyster beds which most people think of in that connection today.

And that is what this story is about.

"It was the Japs," Jocelyn Ormond said. "They put something in the water that killed off all the oysters. The Japs were all up and down this coast just before the war, pretending to be fishermen, but actually they were taking soundings and mapping our fortifications and getting ready for all kinds of sabotage. Like poisoning the oysters."

"I know the story," said the Saint lazily. "And every one of them had a Leica in his pocket and an admiral's uniform in his duffle bag. Some of it's probably true. But can you tell me how destroying the Mexican pearl industry would help their war plans against the United States? Or do you think it was some weird Oriental way of putting a hex on everything connected with pearls, like for instance Pearl Harbor?"

"You're kidding," she said sulkily. "The oysters *did* die. You can't get away from that."

When they were first introduced by a joint acquaintance he had had a puzzling feeling that he and this girl had met somewhere before. After a while he realized that they had, but it had never been in the flesh. She was a type. She was the half-disrobed siren

on the jacket of a certain type of paper-bound fiction. She was the girl in the phony-tough school of detective stories, the girl that the grotesque private eye with the unpaid rent and the bottle of cheap whiskey in his desk drawer is always running into, who throws her thighs and breasts at him and responds like hot jelly to his simian virility. She had all the standard equipment—the auburn hair, the bedroom eyes, the fabulous mammary glands, the clothes that clung suggestively to her figure, the husky voice, the full moist lips that looked as if they would respond lecherously enough to satisfy any addict of that style of writing.

The Saint hadn't yet sampled them. He couldn't somehow make himself feel like the type of cut-rate Casanova who should have been cast opposite her. He couldn't shake off a sense of unreality about her perfect embodiment of the legendary super-floozy. But there was no doubt that she was sensational, and in a cautious way he was fascinated.

He knew that other men had been less reluctant. She was Mrs. Ormond now, but she had discarded Ormond some time ago in Reno. Before Ormond, there had been another husband, a man with the earthy name of Ned Yarn. It was Ned Yarn whose resusitated ghost was with them now, intangibly.

"I mean," she said, "they were all supposed to have died—until I got that letter from Ned."

Simon went to the rail of the balcony which indiscreetly connected their rooms, and gazed out over the harbor and the ugly outlines of La Paz, softened now by the glamor of night lights. They were sitting outside to escape the sweltering stuffiness of their rooms, the soiled shabbiness of the furniture and decoration, and the sight of the giant cockroaches which shared their tenancy. For such reasons as that, and because your chronicler does not want to be sued for libel, the hotel they were staying at must be nameless.

"Let me see it again," he said.

She took the worn sheet of cheap paper from her purse and gave it to him, and he held it up to read it by the light from inside the room.

Dear Joss:

I know you will be surprised to hear from me now, but I had no heart to write when I could only make excuses which you wouldn't believe. You were quite right to divorce me. But now I have found the pearls I came for. I can pay everyone back, and perhaps make everything all right with you, too.

The only thing is, it may be delicate to handle. Say nothing to anyone, but send somebody you can trust who knows pearls and doesn't mind taking a chance. Or come yourself. Whoever comes,

go to the "Cantina de las Flores" in La Paz and ask for Consuelo. She will bring him to me. I won't let you down this time.

Always yours,

Ned.

The writing was awkward and straggly, up hill and down dale, the long letters overlapping between lines.

"Is this his writing?" Simon asked.

She nodded.

"It wasn't always that bad. Maybe he was drunk when he wrote it. Now that we're here, I wonder why I came on this wild-goose chase." She stared at the anemic residue in her glass. "Fix me another slug, Saint."

He went back into the room, fished melting ice cubes from the warming water in the pitcher, and poured Peter Dawson over them. That was how she took it, and it never seemed to affect her much. Another characteristic that was strictly from literature.

"That letter is dated over five months ago," he said. "Did it take all that time to reach you, or did you just decide to do something about it?"

"Both," she said. "I didn't get it for a long time—I was moving around, and it was just lucky that people kept forwarding it. And when I got it I didn't know whether to believe it, or what to do about it. If I hadn't met you, I mightn't ever have done anything about it. But you know about jewels."

"And I'm notorious for taking chances."

"And I like you."

He smiled into her slumbrous eyes, handing her the refilled glass, and sat down again in the other chair, stretching his long legs in front of him.

"You liked Ormond when you married him, I suppose," he said. "What was the mistake in that?"

"He was a rich old man, but I thought he needed me. I found out that all he wanted was my body."

"It sounds like a reasonable ambition."

"But he wanted a bird in a gilded cage. To keep me in purdah, like a sultan. He didn't want to go places and do things. He'd give me presents, but he wouldn't let me have a penny of my own to spend."

"An obvious square," said the Saint. "But you fixed him. What about Ned?"

"I was very young then, just a small-town girl trying to crash Hollywood and making doughnut money as an extra. It was during the war and he was young too, and strong and healthy, and that Navy uniform did something for him. It happened to a lot of girls . . . Then the war was over and I woke up, and he was just a working diver, a sort of underwater mechanic, earning a mechanic's wages and going no-

where except under docks and bridges."

Simon nodded, leaning back with his freebooter's profile turned up impersonally to the stars. He had heard all this before, of course, but he wanted to hear it once again, to be *sure* he had heard it all.

"That's all this Tiltman wanted," she said. "A hard-working diver. Percival Tiltman —what a name! I should have known he was a phony, with that name, and his old-school-tie British accent.

"But he knew where the richest oyster bed of all was, and it was one that the Japs had missed somehow, and he had some real pearls to prove it. Of course, he needed money, too—for equipment, a boat, and bribes. Mostly for bribes. That should have been the tip-off, all by itself."

"I don't know," said the Saint. "I can believe that the Mexican Government might take a dim view of foreigners coming down and walking off with their pearls."

"Well, anyway, he got it."

"It was about ten thousand dollars, wasn't it?"

"Exactly eleven thousand. Most of it was from my friends, people I knew in the Hollywood studios. Ned's best friend put some in. And twenty-five hundred was my own savings, from what Ned had sent me while he was overseas."

"And Ned and Brother Tiltman took off with it all in cash?"

"All of it. And that's the last anyone heard of them, until I got this letter."

"How hard did you try to find him?"

"What could I do? I didn't have an address. Ned was going to write to me when he got down here. He never did."

"There's an American vice-consul."

"We tried that, after a while. He never heard of them."

"How about the police?"

"I wrote to them. They took three weeks to answer, and just said they had no information. Perhaps some of the money *was* used for bribes, at that."

"I mean the American police. Didn't anyone make a complaint?" Simon asked.

"How could I? And make myself the wife of a runaway crook? Our friends were very nice about it. They were sorry for me. I've never felt so humiliated. But it was all too obvious. Ned and Tiltman had just taken our money and run off with it. It wasn't even worth anybody's while to come down here and try to trace them. They'd had too much of a start. By the time we realized what they'd done, they could have been anywhere in South America, anywhere in the world, for that matter. I just waited 'til Ned had been gone a year, and divorced him as quietly as I could, for desertion."

"But," said the Saint, "it looks

now as if he's been here all the time, after all."

Mrs. Ormond swished the Scotch around over the ice in her glass with a practiced rotary motion, brooding over it sullenly.

"Perhaps he came back. Perhaps he spent his share of the money and now thinks he can promote some more with the same gag. Who knows?"

"It was nearly ten years ago when he disappeared, wasn't it?" said the Saint. "If he got half the loot, he's lived on less than six hundred a year. That's really making it last. If he was going to try for more, why would he leave it so long? And why did he disappear when he did?"

"Don't ask me," she said. "You're the detective. All I know is, I *feel* there's something fishy about it. That's why I wouldn't have come here alone. You'd better be careful. I hope you're smarter than he is." She smiled. "But of course you are."

Simon raised an eyebrow. "When this started you gave me the impression that he was almost boringly simple."

"That's what everyone thought. But look what he did. He must have had us all fooled. You can't believe anything he says."

"I'm not exactly notorious for buying wooden nickels—or plasticene pearls. I'll keep my guard up."

"Do that in more ways than one. I told you, he was a very husky guy. And he could be plenty tough."

"I can be tough too, sometimes."

She eyed him long and appraisingly. "Come here," she said, in her throatiest voice.

He unfolded himself languidly and stood beside her.

"No, don't tower over me. Come down to my level."

He squatted on his heels, close to her chair.

"You look strong," she murmured, "in a lean, leathery way. But I never found out how far it went. That's why I like you. You're different. Most men are in such a hurry to show me."

Her hand felt his arm, sliding up under his short sleeve. Her eyes widened a little, became soft and dreamy. The hand slid up to his shoulder and the tip of her tongue touched her parted lips.

Simon Templar grinned, and stood up. "I'm strong enough," he said. "And I'll be very careful."

III

He had already located the Cantina de las Flores; had, in fact, been inside it earlier in the evening. It was a small and dingy bistro in a back street of unromantic odors, and the only flowers in its vicinity were those which were painted in garish colors on the sign over the door. An unshaven bartender in a dirty shirt had informed him that Con-

suelo would not be there until ten that night. It was only a few minutes after that hour when the Saint strolled towards it again.

He would probably have been less than human if he had not thought more about Jocelyn Ormond than about Consuelo on the way over. Consuelo was only a name; but Mrs. Ormond was not easy to forget.

He tried to rationalize his reaction to her, and couldn't do it. According to all tradition, there should have been no problem. She not only had all the physical attributes, in extravagant abundance, but she knew every line in the script, in all its cereal ripeness. The dumbest private eye on the newsstands could have taken his cue and helped himself to the offering. Yet the Saint found a perverse pleasure in pretending to be blandly unconscious of the routine, in acting as if her incredible voluptuousness left him only amused. Which was an outright glandular lie.

He shook his head. Maybe he was just getting too old inside . . .

The bar, which had been drably deserted when he was there before, was now starting to jump. There were a dozen and a half cash customers, a few obviously local citizens but a majority with the heterogeneous look of seamen from visiting freighters—a sterling and salty clientele, no doubt, but somewhat less than elegantly refined.

There were also half a dozen girls, who seemed to function occasionally as waitresses but who also obviously offered more general hospitality and comradeship. Instead of the atmospheric obbligato of guitars, with which no Hollywood producer could have resisted backgrounding such a set, an enormous juke box blared deafening orchestrations out of its rococo edifice of plastic panels behind which colored lights flowed and blended like delirious rainbows, a dazzling and stentorian witness to the irresistible march of North American culture.

Simon went to the counter and ordered a beer. The bartender, only a few hours more unshaven and a few hours dirtier than at their first meeting, looked at him curiously as he poured it.

"You are the *señor* who was looking for Consuelo?"

"Is she here now?"

"I will tell her," the man said.

Simon took his glass over to the juke box and stood reading the list of its musical offerings, toying with the faint hope that he might find a title which suggested that in exchange for a coin some slightly less earsplitting melody might be evoked.

"You were asking for me?" a voice said at his shoulder.

The Saint turned slowly, because the quality of the voice had jolted him momentarily off balance. It was an amazing thing for a mere voice to do at any time,

and against the strident din through which he had to hear it, it was almost incredible. Yet that was what it achieved, without effort.

It was the loveliest speaking voice he had ever heard. It had the pure tones of cellos and crystal bells in it, yet it held a true warmth and a caress and a passion that made the untrammeled sexiness of Jocelyn Ormond's voice sound like a crude rasp. Just those few words it spoke stripped goose pimples up his spine. He wanted the space of a breath to re-establish his equanimity before he saw the owner.

Then he saw her—and the goose pimples tightened and chilled as if at a touch of icy air, and the jolt he had felt turned to a leaden numbness.

She could have been under thirty, but she was aged in the cruel way that women of her racial mixture, in that climate, will age. You could see Spanish blood in her, and Indian, and undoubtedly some African. Her figure might once have been enticingly ripe, but now it was overblown and mushy. Her black hair was lank and greasy, her nose broad and flat, her painted mouth coarse and thick. Even under a heavy layer of powder that was several shades too light, her complexion showed dark and horribly ravaged with pock-marks. She smiled, showing several gold teeth.

"I am Consuelo," she said in that magical voice.

Somehow the Saint managed to keep all reaction out of his face, or hoped he did. "I am looking for an American, a Señor Yarn," he said. "He wrote a letter saying that one should come here and ask for you."

Her eyes flickered over him. *"Si,"* she said. "I remember. I will take you to him. *Un momentito."*

She went to the bar and spoke briefly to the bartender, who scowled and shrugged. She came back. "Come," she said.

Simon put down his glass and went out with her.

The sidewalk was so narrow that there was barely room for them both, and when they met any other walkers there was a subtle contest of bluff to decide which party should give way.

"It was a long time ago that he told me to expect someone," she said. "Why did you take so long?"

"His letter took a long time. And there were other delays."

"You have the letter with you?"

"It was not written to me. I was sent by the person to whom he wrote."

Some instinct of delicacy compelled him to evade a more exact naming of the person. He said, cautiously, "You know what it was about?"

"I know nothing."

Her high heels clicked a tattoo of fast short steps, hobbled by a

skirt that was too tight from hip to knee.

"I have never met Señor Yarn," he said. "What kind of a man is he?"

She stopped, looking up to search his face with a vehement suddenness. "He is a good man. The best I have ever known. I hope you are good for him!"

"I hope so too," said the Saint gently.

They walked on, zigzagging through alleys that grew steadily narrower and darker and more noisome; but the Saint, whose sense of direction could be switched on like a recording machine, never lost track of a turn. The people who shared the streets with them became fewer and vaguer shadows. Life went indoors, and barricaded itself against the night behind shutters through which only an occasional streak of yellow light leaked out. It revealed itself only as a muffled grumbling voice, a sharp ripple of shrill laughter, the wail of a baby, the faint tinny sound of a cheap radio or phonograph; and against that dim sound track the clatter of Consuelo's heels seemed to ring out like blows on an anvil.

If the Saint had not stepped silently from incurable habit he would have found himself doing it with a self-conscious impulse to minimize his intrusion. If he could conceivably have picked up Consuelo, or any of the other girls in the Cantina de las Flores, without an introduction, and had found himself being led where he was for any other reason, he would have been tense with suspicion and wishing for the weight of a gun in his pocket. But he did not think he had anything to fear now.

When she stopped, a faint tang of sea smells penetrating the hodgepodge of less natural aromas told his nostrils that they were near another part of the waterfront. The shack that loomed beside them was different only in details of outline from the others around it—a shanty of crumbling plaster and decaying timbers, with a rambling roof line which could consist of nothing but an accumulation of innumerable inadequate repairs.

"Here," she said.

She opened the cracked plank door and Simon followed her as she went inside.

The whole house was only one little room. There was a brass bedstead against one wall, with a faded chintz curtain across the corner beside it which might have concealed some sort of sanitary facilities. In another corner, there was an ancient oil cooking stove, and a bare counter board with a chipped enamel basin. On shelves above the counter were cheap dishes and utensils, and a few canned foods. Clothing hung on hooks in the walls, between an assortment of innocuous lithographs pinned up according to

some unguessable system of selection.

"Ned," Consuelo said very clearly, "I have brought the *americano* you sent for."

The man sat in the one big chair in the room. It was an overstuffed chair of old-fashioned design with a heavily patched slip cover, but he looked comfortable in it, as if he had used it a lot. He had untidy blond hair and a powerful frame. The flesh on his big bones was soft and shrunken and unhealthy, although his skin had a good tan, and his clean cotton shirt and trousers hung loosely on him. His face had the cragginess of a skull, an impression which was accentuated by the shadows of the dark glasses he wore even though the only light was an oil lamp turned down so low that it gave no more illumination than a candle. He turned only his head.

"I was afraid no one was ever coming," he said.

"My name is Templar," said the Saint. "I was sent by—the party you wrote to."

"My wife," the man said. "You don't have to be tactful. Consuelo knows about her."

"Your ex-wife," said the Saint.

Ned Yarn sat still and the dark lenses over his eyes were a mask. "I guess I'd sort of expected that. How did she get it? Desertion, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Is she . . ."

"She was married again, to a man named Ormond."

"I don't know him."

"They're divorced now."

"I see." Yarn's bony fingers moved nervously. "And you?"

"Just an acquaintance. Nothing more. What with changing her name, and changing her address several times, apparently your letter took a long time to find her. Then she didn't want to come here alone, and couldn't decide who to trust. Now I seem to be it."

"Sit down," Ned Yarn said. Simon sat on a plain wooden chair by the oilcloth-covered table. Yarn looked around and said, "Do we have anything to drink, Consuelo?"

"Some tequila."

She brought a half-empty bottle and three small jelly-glasses, and poured a little for each of them. She put one of the glasses on the edge of the table nearest to Yarn. Yarn stretched out his hand, touched the edge of the table and slid his fingers along it until they closed on the glass.

"You must excuse me seeming so helpless," he said harshly. "But you see, I'm blind."

IV

The Saint lighted a cigarette, and put his lighter away very quietly. He glanced at Consuelo for a moment as she sat down slowly on the other wooden chair

at the table, and then he looked at Ned Yarn again.

"I'm sorry," he said. "How long ago did that happen?"

"Almost as soon as I got here." He gave a kind of short two-toned grunt that might have been meant for a laugh. "How much did she tell you about all this?"

"As much as she knows, I think."

"I can figure what else she thinks. And what everybody else thinks. But you know as much now as I knew when I came down here with Tiltman. That's the truth, so help me."

"I hope you'll tell me the rest."

Yarn sipped his drink and put it down without a grimace, as if he was completely inured to the vile taste.

"We flew down here from Tijuana, and I thought it was all on the level. A chance to make some big money legitimately—that is, if we weren't bothered about bribing a few Mexicans not to watch us too closely. I'm just a sucker, I guess, but I fell for it like all the others. I was even carrying the money myself. We checked in at a hotel, the Perla."

"But the American vice-consul and the police couldn't find any trace of you. That seems like an obvious place for them to have started asking."

"Tiltman registered for us both, only he didn't use our real names. If you want to check up on me, ask if they've got a record of Thompson and Young. He told me that later."

"How long did he play it straight?"

"We had dinner. Tiltman was supposed to have arranged for a boat before we left Los Angeles. I was excited and raring to go, of course. I didn't even want to wait till morning to look it over. I wanted to see it that night. He tried to stall me, then he gave in. We set out, walking from the hotel. He led me through all kinds of back streets—I haven't the faintest idea where. Presently, in one of the darkest of them we came to a bar, and he suggested we stop in for a drink."

"The Cantina de las Flores?"

"No. I don't even know the name of it. But anyway, we went in. We had a drink. And then, as calmly as anything, he said, 'Look, Ned, I'm going to stop beating about the bush. There isn't any boat. There isn't any diving equipment. All that stuff we ordered sent down here from Los Angeles, I cancelled the order and got your money back.' "

"And the great lost bed of pearl oysters?"

"He said, 'That's just a rumor I heard when I was down here, sort of a local legend. But I don't know where it is, and nobody else does. It just gave me the idea for a good story to pick up a nice lot of money with. All that money you've got in your pocket,' he said."

"That must have called for another drink," murmured the Saint.

"At first I thought he was kidding. But I soon knew he wasn't. He said, 'I could've taken it from you tonight and left you holding the bag. But I like you, Ned, and I could use a partner. I've got tickets for both of us on a plane to Mazatlán. Let's split the money and go on—and make a lot more like it.' "

Simon barely touched his glass to his lips. "And you said no?"

"I swear it. I told him he'd never get his hands on any of the money I had. I was taking it right back to Los Angeles, and I'd see what the police here could do about getting back the refund he'd gotten on the diving equipment. And I walked out."

Ned Yarn twisted his knuckles tensely together. "I didn't get very far. He must have followed me and crept up behind me. Something hit me on the head and I was out like a light. It's been lights out for me ever since."

"The money was gone, of course."

Yarn nodded. He said, "You tell him, Consuelo."

She said, "I found him. It was just outside here. I was going to work. I thought he was drunk. Then I saw the blood. I could not leave him to die. I took him in my house. Then, when he did not get well quickly, I was afraid. I thought: if I call the police they will say I did it to rob him. I sent for a doctor I know. Together we took care of him. He was sick for a long time. Then I could not turn him out because he was blind."

"And you've looked after him ever since," said the Saint, and deliberately averted his eyes.

"I was glad to." He heard only her voice. "Because then I had fallen in love with him."

And now the Saint understood at least a part of that strange story.

Ned Yarn had never seen Consuelo. He had met her only as a voice, a voice of indescribable sweetness, just as the Saint had first met her. But Ned Yarn had never been able to turn his eyes and have the mental vision that the voice created shattered by the sight of her coarse, raddled face.

And the woman who spoke with the heavenly voice had been kind to him in a way that fulfilled all the promise of its rich tenderness. Her figure would have been better then, and perhaps even her face less marred. And his fingers, when they clumsily explored her features, would not have been sensitive enough to trace them as they really were. They could easily have confirmed to him a picture that his imagination had already formed and was determined to believe. And in his perpetual darkness there could be no disillusion . . .

"Maybe you think I'm a bum,"

Ned Yarn said. "Maybe I am. But what could I do? I didn't have a penny and I couldn't go more than a few steps by myself. Tiltman probably thought he'd killed me with that crack on the head. He might almost as well have. It was months before I knew what was going on. And even then I still couldn't think straight, I guess."

"You figured by that time everyone would have decided you'd run off with Tiltman and the money," said the Saint.

"Even Joss. I couldn't blame her. I was just too ashamed to try to write and explain. I didn't think anyone would believe me. I guess I was wrong, but by the time I started to think it out properly it was later still—that much more too late. And by then . . ." The premature lines in his face softened amazingly. "By then I was in love too. I didn't really want to go back."

Ash tumbled from the Saint's long-neglected cigarette as he put it to his mouth again.

"But you finally wrote to Jocelyn," he said.

"I'm coming to that. After a while I realized I couldn't go on forever doing nothing but being sorry for myself, letting Consuelo keep me on the money she made as a waitress."

From the matter-of-fact way Yarn said it, Simon knew that the man had no idea of the kind of place she worked in. He was aware of the woman's eyes on him but he gave no sign of it.

"Her doctor thought there might be a chance of getting my sight back if I could go to a first-class specialist," Ned Yarn said. "But that would cost plenty of money. And I couldn't go back to the States for treatment when it'd probably mean being put in jail. I needed even more money to pay everybody back what I'd helped them to lose through Tiltman. I wanted to do that anyway. When I finally got my guts back I knew that was what I had to do somehow—pay everyone off, get my eyes fixed, and make a fresh start."

"You still believed in that overlooked oyster bed?"

"It was the only chance I could think of. Eventually I talked Consuelo into helping me. She had a friend who's a fisherman, and he'd let us borrow his boat sometimes. We went out as often as we could. We searched all over, everywhere."

"You went diving, when you were blind?"

"No, Consuelo did that. With a face mask. She can swim like a fish, she tells me. I just sat in the boat. Then, when at last she found oysters I'd haul up the baskets she filled, and help her to open them. And as I wrote to Joss, we finally did it. We found those pearls!"

"The jackpot?" Simon asked.

Ned Yarn shook his head. "I

don't know. Quite a few, so far. Consuelo sold a few small ones, to get money to make us just a little more comfortable. And six months ago we bought a boat of our own, so we could go out more often. Of course she got practically nothing for the pearls because of the way she had to sell them. And she couldn't show any of the big ones without attracting too much attention. That's why I had to get in touch with someone who'd know their real value, perhaps be able to sell them for what they're worth, up north."

At Simon's side the woman turned abruptly, her over-plucked eyebrows drawn together. "Is he a buyer of pearls?" she asked. "Is that why he is here? You did not tell me, Ned."

"I know." The man smiled awkwardly. "I told you I was sending for someone who would help us to buy some real diving equipment, so we could really bring up those oysters after I taught you to use it. I was afraid of getting your hopes too high. But actually, that's just what he might do."

"If the pearls are not worth so much you will use the money to buy diving equipment to look for more?"

"That's right."

"But if they're worth enough," said the Saint, "you want to pay back eleven thousand dollars to various people and see if something can be done about your eyes?"

"Yes."

"And then come back to Consuelo," said the Saint softly.

"Oh, no," Ned Yarn said. "I wouldn't leave here unless she came with me."

Consuelo stood up with a sudden rough movement that shook the table. She stood beside Yarn, with a hand on his shoulder, and his hand went up at once to cover hers.

"I do not like it," she said. "How do you know you can trust him?"

"I'll have to risk it," Yarn said grimly. "Show him the pearls, Consuelo."

She stared at the Saint defensively, her eyes hot and hostile and shifting like the eyes of a cornered animal.

"I will not."

"Consuelo!"

"I cannot," she said. "I have already sold them."

"What?"

"Si, si," she said quickly. "I sold them. To a dealer I met at the Cantina. I was going to surprise you. He gave me five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!"

"For a start. He will bring me the rest soon. I have it here." She twisted away towards the bed and rummaged under the mattress. In a moment she was back, thrusting crumpled bills into his hands. "There! Count them. It

is all there. And there will be more!"

Ned Yarn did not count the bills. He did not even hold them. They spilled over his lap and fluttered down to the floor. He had caught one of Consuelo's wrists, and clung to it with both hands, his blind eyes turned up towards her, a stricken look on his face.

"What is this?" he said in a terrible, hoarse voice. "I never thought you lied to me. But you're lying now. Your voice tells me."

"I do not lie!"

"Templar," said Yarn, with a straining throat. "Please help me. There's a pottery jar on the top shelf, in the corner over the stove. Look in it and tell me what you find."

Simon got to his feet, a little uncertainly. Then he crossed to the corner in three quick strides. There was only one jar that fitted the description. With his height, he could just reach it.

Consuelo writhed and twisted in Yarn's grip like a lassooed wildcat, so that the chair he sat in rocked. She pounded on his head and shoulders with her free fist. "No, no!" she screamed. "Let me go! Don't touch them!"

But the blind man's grip held her like an anchor, and she became still at last as the Saint tilted the jar over one cupped hand, so that the ripple of things rolling from it could be heard over the heavy breathing which was the only other thing that broke the silence.

Simon Templar looked at the dozen or so cheap beads of various sizes that poured from the vase into the hollow of his palm, and looked up from them to the defiant, streaming eyes of Ned Yarn's woman.

"I think these are the most beautiful pearls I've ever seen," he said softly.

V

The woman slid down to the floor beside Yarn and sat there with her face pressed against his thigh.

"Why did you lie, Consuelo?" Yarn asked gently. "What on earth upset you like that?"

"I think I can guess," said the Saint. "She was trying to protect you. After all, neither of you know me from Adam and you are taking rather a lot on trust. Probably she wanted time to talk it over with you first."

The woman sobbed.

Ned Yarn caressed her stringy hair, murmuring little soothing sounds as she clung to his legs.

"It's all right, *querida.*" His face was still troubled. "But the money—the five hundred dollars. Where did that come from?"

"I bet I can answer that too," said the Saint. "She'd held out two or three more small pearls and sold them, and she was saving the money for a surprise present

of some kind. Is that right, Consuelo?"

She lifted her head and looked at the Saint. "No," she said. "It is my own money. I earned it and saved it myself. I kept it from you, Ned. I did not want to spend quite all our money on the search for pearls. I thought perhaps we will never find any pearls, but I would keep saving and one day perhaps I could take you myself to see if you could be cured. That is the truth."

Yarn lifted her up and kissed her. "How blind can a man be?" he said huskily.

"Some people would give their eyes for what you've got," Simon said.

"And I wish I had mine so that I could see it. I know how beautiful she must be, but I would like to see her. She is beautiful, isn't she?"

"She is beautiful, Ned."

"Please, you must both forgive me," Consuelo said in a low voice. "Let us have some tequila."

Simon looked down at the little heap of beads in his hand. "What do you want me to do with the pearls?" he asked.

The blind man's dark glasses held his gaze like hypnotic hungry eyes. "Are they really valuable?"

"I'd say they were, but I'm not an expert," Simon replied, improvising with infinite care. "They'd have to be sold in the right place, of course. As you may know, individual pearls don't mean so much, unless they're really gigantic. Most pearls are made into necklaces and things like that, which means they have to be matched, and they gain in value by being strung together. And it's a funny market these days, on account of all the cultured pearls that only an expert can tell from real ones. There are still people who'll spend a fortune on the genuine article, but you don't find them waiting on every jeweler's doorstep. It takes work, preparation, patience—and time."

"But, eventually—they should be worth a lot?"

"Eventually," said the Saint soberly, "they may mean more to you than you'd believe right now." Ned Yarn's breath came and went in a long sigh. "That's all I wanted to know," he said. "I can wait some more. I'm used to waiting."

"Do you want me to take the pearls back to the States and see what I can do with them?"

"Yes. And Consuelo and I will go on fishing for more. At least we'll know we aren't wasting our time. Where's that drink you were talking about, Consuelo?" She put the glass in his hand, and he raised it. "Here's luck to all of us."

"Especially to you two." Simon looked at the woman over his glass and said, *"Salud!"*

He wrapped the beads carefully in a scrap of newspaper and tucked it into his pocket. "Do you

mind if Consuelo guides me back from here?" he asked. "I don't want to get lost."

"Of course, we don't want that. And thank you for coming."

The night was the same, perhaps a little cooler, perhaps a little more muted in its secret sounds. The woman's heels tapped the same monotonous rhythm, perhaps a little slower. They walked quite a long way without speaking, as they had before; but now they kept silence as if to make sure that they were beyond the most fantastic range of a blind man's hearing before they spoke.

Simon Templar was glad that the silence lasted as long as it did. He had a lot to think about, to weigh and balance and to look ahead from.

Finally she said, almost timidly, "I think you understand, *señor.*"

"I think so," he said. Then he waited to hear more from her.

"When he began to be discontented we went out in the boat and began looking for pearls. For a long time that made him happy. But presently, when we found nothing, he was unhappy again. At last we found some oysters. Then again he had hope. But there were no pearls. So presently, after some more time, he was sad again. It hurt too much to see him despair. So at last I let him find some pearls. At first they were real, I think. I took them from some earrings that my mother gave me. And after that they were cheap beads."

"And when you said you sold them?"

"I did sell the real ones, for a few pesos. The rest was money I had saved for him, like the five hundred dollars."

"Did you mean what I heard you say—that if you could save enough you meant to take him to a specialist somewhere who might be able to bring back his sight?"

There was a long pause before she answered.

"I would have done it when I had the courage," she said. "I *will* do it one day, when I am strong enough. But it will not be easy. Because I know that when he sees me with his eyes he will not love me any longer."

He felt it all the way through him down to his toes, like the subsonic tremor of an earthquake, the tingling realization of what those few simple words meant.

She was not blind, and she used mirrors. If she had ever deluded herself it had not been for long. She knew very well what they told her. Homely and aged and scarred as she was, no man such as she had dreamed of as a young girl would ever love her as a young girl dreams of love. Unless he was blind. Even before the aging had taken hold she had discovered that, and seen the infinite emptiness ahead. But one night, a miracle had brought into her sordid life a blind man . . .

She had taken him in and cared for him in his sickness, finding him clean and grateful, and lavished on him all the frustrated richness of her heart. And out of his helplessness, and for her kindness and the tender beauty of her voice, he had loved her in return. She had used what money she could earn in any way to humor his obsession, to bring him back from despair, to encourage hope and keep alive his dream. And one day she believed she might be able to make at least part of the hope come true, and have him made whole—and let him go.

Simon walked slowly through a night that no longer seemed dark and sordid. "When he knows what you have done," he said, "he *should* think you the most beautiful woman in the world."

"He will not love me then," she said without bitterness. "I know men."

"Now I can tell you something. He has been blind for nearly ten years. There will have been too many degenerative changes in his eyes by this time. There is hardly any chance at all that an operation could cure him now. And I never thought I could say any man was lucky to be blind, but I think Ned Yarn is that man."

"Nevertheless, I shall have to try, one day."

"It will be a long time still before you have enough money."

She looked up at him. "But the beads you took away. You told him they were worth much. Shall I tell him the truth?"

It was all clear to Simon now, the strangest crime that he had to put on his bizarre record. "He will never hear another word from me. I shall just disappear. And presently it will be clear to him that I was a crook after all, as he believes you suspected from the start. He will believe that I stole them."

"But the shock—what will it do to him?"

"He will get over it. He cannot blame you. He will think that your instinct was right all along, that he should have listened to you. You can help him to see that, without rebuking him."

"Then he will want to start looking for pearls again."

"And you will find them. From time to time I will send you a few, for you to put in the oysters. Real ones. You can make them last. You need not find them too often, to keep him hoping. And when you sell them, which you can do as a Mexican, without getting into trouble, you must do what your heart tells you with the money. I think you will be happy," said the Saint.

VI

Mrs. Ormond, formerly Mrs. Yarn, lay back in her chair and laughed, deeply and vibrantly in her exquisitely rounded throat, so

that the ice cubes clinked in the tall glass she held.

"So the dope finally found his level," she gurgled. "Living in a smelly slum hovel with a frowsy native slut. While she's whoring in a crummy saloon and dredging up pearl beads to kid him he's little better than a pimp. I might have known it!"

She looked more unreally beautiful than ever in the dim light of the balcony, a sort of cross between a calendar picture and a lecherous trash-writer's imagining, in the diaphanous negligée that she had inevitably put on to await the Saint's return in. Her provocative breasts quivered visibly under the filmy nylon and crowded into its deep-slashed neckline as she laughed, and some of the beads rolled out of the unfolded paper in her lap and pattered on the bare floor.

Simon had told her only the skeletal facts, omitting the amplifications and additions which were his own, and waited for her reaction.

And this was it.

"I hadn't realized it was quite so funny," he said stonily.

"You couldn't," she choked. "My dear man, you don't know the half of it. Here I come dragging myself down to this ghastly dump, just in case Yarn has really got on to something I couldn't afford to miss. And I find all he's got is a mulatto concubine and a few beads. Yet, all the time, right here in my jewel case, I've got a string of pearls that were good enough for Catherine of Russia!"

Simon stood very still. "You have?" he said.

"Just one of those baubles that Ormond used to pass out when he was indulging his sultan complex. Like I told you. I think he only paid about fifteen grand for them at an auction. And me wasting all this time and effort, not to mention yours, on Ned Yarn's imaginary oyster bed!"

At last the Saint began to laugh too, very quietly.

"It is rather delirious," he said. "Let me fix you another drink, then let's go on with some unfinished business."

i'll show you my tarn

by . . . Hugh Walpole

The lake, his tarn, was his true love. And in the end it was also the repository of his vengeance.

As Foster moved across the room and bent over the bookcase, leaning forward a little, choosing now one book, now another with his eye, his host, seeing the muscles of the back of his thin, scraggy neck stand out above his low flannel collar, thought of the ease with which he could squeeze that throat, and the pleasure, the triumphant, lustful pleasure, that such an action would give him.

The low, white-walled, white-ceilinged room was flooded with the mellow, kindly Lakeland sun. October is a wonderful month in the English lakes, golden, rich and perfumed, slow suns moving through apricot-tinted skies to ruby evening glories. The shadows lie then thick about that beautiful country, in dark purple patches, in long web-like patterns of silver gauze, in thick splotches of amber and gray. The clouds pass in galleons across the mountains, now veiling, now revealing, now descending with ghost-like armies to the very breast of the plains, suddenly rising to the softest of blue skies and lying thin in lazy langorous color.

This masterly writer of many classics, Sir Hugh Walpole, hardly needs an introduction here nor any place where good writing is appreciated. And this story proves our contention that a literary author, when he turns his inventive powers to constructing a crime story, can match the suspenseful reading found in the best works of celebrated practitioners of mystery-detective stories, ranging from Arthur Conan Doyle to Raymond Chandler.

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Fenwick's cottage looked across to Low Fells; on his right, seen through side windows, sprawled the hills above Ullswater.

Fenwick looked at Foster's back and felt suddenly sick, so that he sat down, veiling his eyes for a moment with his hand. Foster had come up there, come all the way from London, to explain. It was so like Foster to want to explain, to want to put things right. For how many years had he known Foster? Why, for twenty at least, and during all those years Foster had been forever determined to put things right with everybody. He could never bear to be disliked; he hated that anyone should think ill of him; he wanted everyone to be his friend. That was one reason, perhaps, why Foster had got on so well, had prospered so in his career; one reason, too, why Fenwick had not.

For Fenwick was the opposite of Foster in this. He did not want friends. He did not care that people should like him—that is, people for whom, for one reason or another, he had contempt. And he had contempt for quite a number of people.

Fenwick looked at that long, thin, bending back and felt his knees tremble. Soon Foster would turn round and that high reedy voice would pipe out something about the books. "What jolly books you have, Fenwick!"

How many, many times in the long watches of the night, when Fenwick could not sleep, had he heard that voice sounding close there—yes, in the very shadows of his bed! And how many times had Fenwick replied to it: "I hate you! You are the cause of my failure in life! You have been in my way always. Always, always, always! Patronizing and pretending, and in truth showing others what a poor thing you thought me, how great a failure, how conceited a fool! I know. You can hide nothing from me! I can hear you!"

For twenty years now Foster had been persistently in Fenwick's way. There had been that affair, so long ago now, when Robins had wanted a sub-editor for his wonderful review, the *Parthenon,* and Fenwick had gone to see him and they had had a splendid talk. How magnificently Fenwick had talked that day; with what enthusiasm he had shown Robins (who was blinded by his own conceit, anyway) the kind of paper the *Parthenon* might be; how Robins had caught his own enthusiasm, how he had pushed his fat body about the room, crying: "Yes, yes, Fenwick, that's fine! That's fine indeed!" And then how, after all, Foster had got that job.

The paper had only lived for a year or so, it is true, but the connection with it had brought Foster into prominence just as it might have brought Fenwick!

Then, five years later, there was Fenwick's novel *The Bitter Aloe* —the novel upon which he had spent three years of blood-and-tears endeavor. Then, in the very same week of publication, Foster brought out *The Circus,* the novel that made his name; although, Heaven knows, the thing was poor enough sentimental trash.

You may say that one novel cannot kill another, but can it not? Had not *The Circus* appeared would not that group of London know-alls—that conceited, limited, ignorant, self-satisfied crowd who nevertheless can do, by their talk, so much to affect a book's good or evil fortunes—have talked about *The Bitter Aloe* and so forced it into prominence? As it was, the book was still-born and *The Circus* went on its prancing, triumphant way.

After that there had been many occasions—some small, some big —and always in one way or another that thin, scraggy body of Foster's was interfering with Fenwick's happiness.

The thing had become, of course, an obsession with Fenwick. Hiding up there in the heart of the Lakes, with no friends, almost no company, and very little money, he was given too much to brooding over his failure. He *was* a failure and it was not his own fault. How could it be his own fault with his talents and his brilliance? It was the fault of modern life and its lack of culture, the fault of the stupid material mess that made up the intelligence of human beings. And the fault of Foster.

Always Fenwick hoped that Foster would keep away from him. He did not know what he would not do did he see the man. And then one day, to his amazement, he received a telegram. It read:

> *Passing through this way. May I stop with you Monday and Tuesday. Giles Foster.*

Fenwick could scarcely believe his eyes. Then, from curiosity, from cynical contempt, from some deeper, more mysterious motive that he dared not analyze, he had telegraphed: *Come.*

And there the man was. And he had come—would you believe it?—to "put things right." He had heard from Hamlin Eddis that Fenwick was hurt with him, had some kind of a grievance.

"I didn't like to feel that, old man, so I thought I'd just stop by and have it out with you, see what the matter was, and put it right."

Last night after supper Foster had tried to put it right. Eagerly, his eyes like a good dog's who is asking for a bone that he knows he thoroughly deserves, he had held out his hand and asked Fenwick to "say what was up."

Fenwick simply had said that

nothing was up; Hamlin Eddis was a damned fool.

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Foster had cried, springing up out of his chair and putting his hand on Fenwick's shoulder. "I'm glad of that, old man. I couldn't bear for us not to be friends. We've been friends so long."

Lord! How Fenwick hated him at that moment!

II

"What a jolly lot of books you have!" Foster turned round and looked at Fenwick with eager, gratified eyes. "Every book here is interesting! I like your arrangement of them, too, and those open bookshelves—it always seems to me a shame to shut up books behind glass!"

Foster came forward and sat down quite close to his host. He even reached forward and laid his hand on his host's knee. "Look here! I'm mentioning it for the last time, positively! But I do want to make quite certain. There *is* nothing wrong between us, is there, old man? I know you assured me last night, but I just want—"

Fenwick looked at him and felt suddenly an exquisite pleasure of hatred. He liked the touch of the man's hand on his knee; he himself bent forward a little and thinking how agreeable it would be to push Foster's eyes in, deep, deep into his head, crunching them, smashing them to purple, leaving the empty, staring bloody sockets, said:

"Why no. Of course not. I told you last night. What could there be?"

The hand gripped the knee a little more tightly.

"I *am* so glad! That's splendid! Splendid! I hope you won't think me ridiculous, but I've always had an affection for you ever since I can remember. I've always wanted to know you better. I've admired your talent so greatly. That novel of yours—the—the one about the aloe—"

" 'The Bitter Aloe'?"

"Ah, yes, that was it. That was a splendid book. Pessimistic, of course, but still fine. It ought to have sold better. I remember thinking so at the time."

"Yes, it ought to have done better."

"Your time will come, though. What I say is that good work always tells in the end."

"Yes, my time will come."

The thin, piping voice went on: "Now I've had more success than I deserved. Oh, yes, I have. You can't deny it. I'm not falsely modest. I mean it. I've got some talent, of course, but not so much as people say. And you! Why, you've got so *much* more than they acknowledge. You have, old man. You have, indeed. Only, I do hope you'll forgive my saying this, perhaps you haven't advanced quite as you might have done. Living up here, shut away

here, closed in by all these mountains, in this wet climate—always raining—why, you're out of things! You don't see people, don't talk and discover what's really going on. Why, look at me!"

Fenwick turned round and looked at him.

"Now, I have half the year in London, where one gets the best of everything, best talk, best music, best plays; and then I'm three months abroad. Italy or Greece or somewhere, and then three months in the country. Now that's an ideal arrangement. You have everything that way."

Italy or Greece or somewhere!

Something turned in Fenwick's breast, grinding, grinding, grinding. How he had longed, oh, how passionately, for just one week in Greece, two days in Sicily! Sometimes he had thought that he might run to it, but when it had come to the actual counting of the pennies . . . And how this fool, this fathead, this self-satisfied conceited, patronizing . . .

He got up, looking out at the golden sun. "What do you say to a walk?" he suggested. "The sun will last for a good hour yet."

III

As soon as the words were out of his lips he felt as though someone else had said them for him. He even turned half-round to see whether anyone else were there. Ever since Foster's arrival on the evening before he had been conscious of this sensation. A walk? Why should he take Foster for a walk, show him his beloved country, point out those curves and lines and hollows, the broad silver shield of Ullswater, the cloudy purple hills hunched like blankets about the knees of some recumbent giant? Why? It was as though he had turned round to someone behind him and had said: "You have some further design in this."

They started out. The road sank abruptly to the lake, then the path ran between trees at the water's edge. Across the lake tones of bright yellow light, crocus-hued, rode upon the blue. The hills were dark.

The very way that Foster walked bespoke the man. He was always a little ahead of you, pushing his long, thin body along with little eager jerks, as though did he not hurry, he would miss something that would be immensely to his advantage. He talked, throwing words over his shoulder to Fenwick as you would throw crumbs of bread to a robin.

"Of course I was pleased. Who would not be? After all, it's a new prize. They've only been awarding it for a year or two, but it's gratifying, really gratifying, to secure it. When I opened the envelope and found the check there—well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. You could, indeed. Of course, a

hundred pounds isn't much. But it's the honor . . ."

Whither were they going? Their destiny was as certain as though they had no free-will. Free-will? There is no free-will. All is Fate. Fenwick suddenly laughed aloud.

Foster stopped. "Why, what is it?"

"What's what?"

"You laughed."

"Something amused me."

Foster slipped his arm through Fenwick's.

"It is jolly to be walking along together like this, arm in arm, friends. I'm a sentimental man. I won't deny it. What I say is that life is short, and one must love one's fellow-beings or where is one? You live too much alone, old man." He squeezed Fenwick's arm. "That's the truth of it."

It was torture, exquisite, heavenly torture. It was wonderful to feel that thin, bony arm pressing against his. Almost you could hear the beating of that other heart. Wonderful to feel that arm and the temptation to take it in your hands and to bend it and twist it and then to hear the bones crack . . . crack . . . crack.

Wonderful to feel that temptation rise through one's body like boiling water and yet not to yield to it. For a moment Fenwick's hand touched Foster's. Then he drew himself apart.

"We're at the village. This is the hotel where they all come in the summer. We turn off at the right here. I'll show you my tarn."

"Your tarn?" asked Foster. "Forgive my ignorance, but what *is* a tarn exactly?"

"A tarn is a miniature lake, a pool of water lying in the lap of the hill. Very quiet, lovely, silent. Some of them are immensely deep."

"I should like to see that."

"It is some little distance, up a rough road. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I have long and strong legs."

"Some of them are immensely deep—unfathomable, nobody has touched the bottom—but quiet, like glass, with shadows that are as black as—"

"Do you know, Fenwick, I have always been afraid of water. I never learned to swim. I'm afraid to go out of my depth. Isn't that ridiculous? But it is all because at my private school, years ago when I was a small boy, some big fellows took me and held me with my head under the water and nearly drowned me. They did indeed. They went farther than they meant to. I can see their faces now . . ."

Fenwick considered this. The picture leapt to his mind. He could see the boys—large, strong fellows, probably—and this skinny thing like a frog, their thick hands about his throat, his legs like gray sticks kicking out of the water, their laughter, their sudden

sense that something was wrong, the skinny body all flaccid and still.

He drew a deep breath.

Foster was walking beside him now, not ahead of him, as though he were a little afraid and needed reassurance. Indeed, the scene had changed. Before and behind them stretched the up-hill path, loose with shale and stones. On their right, on a ridge at the foot of the hill, were some quarries, almost deserted, but the more melancholy in the fading afternoon because a little work still continued there; faint sounds came from the gaunt listening chimneys, a stream of water ran and tumbled angrily into a pool below, once and again a black silhouette, like a question-mark, appeared against the darkening hill.

It was a little steep here and Foster puffed and blew.

Fenwick hated him the more for that. So thin and spare, and still he could not keep in condition! They stumbled, keeping below the quarry, on the edge of the running water, now green, now a dirty white-gray, pushing their way along the side of the hill.

Their faces were set now toward Helvellyn. It rounded the cup of hills closing in the base and then sprawling to the right.

"There's the tarn!" Fenwick exclaimed, then added, "The sun's not lasting as long as I had expected. It's growing dark already."

Foster stumbled and caught Fenwick's arm.

"This twilight makes the hills look strange, like living men. I can scarcely see my way."

"We're alone here," Fenwick answered. "Don't you feel the stillness? The men will have left the quarry now and gone home. There is no one in all this place but ourselves. If you watch you will see a strange green light steal down over the hills. It lasts for but a moment and then it is dark.

"Ah, here is my tarn. Do you know how I love this place, Foster? It seems to belong especially to me, just as much as all your work and your glory and fame and success seem to belong to you. I have this and you have that. Perhaps in the end we are even, after all. Yes . . ."

"But I feel as though that piece of water belonged to me and I to it, and as though we should never be separated. Isn't it black?"

"It is one of the deep ones. No one has ever sounded it. Only Helvellyn knows, and one day I fancy that it will take me, too, into its confidence, will whisper its secrets . . ."

Foster sneezed. "Very nice. Very beautiful, Fenwick. I like your tarn. Charming. And now let's turn back. That is a difficult walk beneath the quarry. It's chilly, too."

"Do you see that little jetty

there?" Fenwick led Foster by the arm. "Someone built that out into the water. He had a boat there, I suppose. Come and look down. From the end of the little jetty it looks so deep and the mountains seem to close round."

Fenwick took Foster's arm and led him to the end of the jetty. Indeed, the water looked deep here. Deep and very black. Foster peered down, then he looked up at the hills that did indeed seem to have gathered close around him. He sneezed again.

"I've caught a cold, I'm afraid. Let's turn homeward, Fenwick, or we shall never find our way."

"Home then," said Fenwick, and his hands closed about the thin, scraggy neck. For the instant the head half-turned, and two startled, strangely childish eyes stared. Then, with a push that was ludicrously simple, the body was impelled forward, there was a sharp cry, a splash, a stir of something white against the swiftly gathering dusk, again and then again, then far-spreading ripples, and silence.

IV

The silence extended. Having enwrapped the tarn it spread as though with finger on lip to the already quiescent hills. Fenwick shared in the silence. He luxuriated in it. He did not move at all. He stood there looking upon the inky water of the tarn, his arms folded, a man lost in intense thought. But he was not thinking. He was only conscious of a warm, luxurious relief, a sensuous feeling that was not thought at all.

Foster was gone, that tiresome, prating, conceited, self-satisfied fool! Gone, never to return. The tarn assured him of that. It stared back into Fenwick's face approvingly as though it said: "You have done well, a clean and necessary job. We have done it together, you and I. I am proud of you."

He was proud of himself. At last he had done something definite with his life. Thought, eager, active thought, was beginning now to flood his brain. For all these years he had hung around in this place doing nothing but cherish grievances, weak, backboneless. Now at last there was action.

He drew himself up and looked at the hills. He was proud. And he was cold. He was shivering. He turned up the collar of his coat. Yes, there was that faint green light that always lingered in the shadows of the hills for a brief moment before darkness came. It was growing late. He had better return.

Shivering now so that his teeth chattered, he started off down the path, and then was aware that he did not wish to leave the tarn. The tarn was friendly, the only friend he had in all the world. As he stumbled along in the dark this

sense of loneliness grew. He was going home to an empty house. There had been a guest in it last night. Who was it? Why, Foster, of course. Foster with his silly laugh and amiable, mediocre eyes. Well, Foster would not be there now. No, he never would be there again.

And suddenly Fenwick started to run. He did not know why, except that, now that he had left the tarn, he was lonely. He wished that he could have stayed there all night, but because it was cold he could not, and so now he was running so that he might be at home with the lights and the familiar furniture and all the things that he knew, to reassure him.

As he ran the shale and stones scattered beneath his feet. They made a tit-tattering noise under him, and someone else seemed to be running, too. He stopped and the other runner also stopped. He breathed in the silence. He was hot now. The perspiration was trickling down his cheeks. He could feel a dribble of it down his back, inside his shirt. His knees were pounding. His heart was thumping.

And all around him the hills were so amazingly silent, now, like rubber clouds that you could push in or pull out as you do those India-rubber faces, gray against the night sky of a crystal purple, upon whose surface, like the twinkling eyes of boats at sea, stars were now appearing in glittering array.

His knees steadied, his heart beat less fiercely, and he began to run again. Suddenly he had turned the corner and was out at the hotel. Its lamps were kindly and reassuring. Now he walked quietly along the lake-side path, and had it not been for the certainty that someone was treading behind him he would have been comfortable and at his ease. He stopped once or twice and looked back, and once he stopped and called out, "Who's there?" Only the rustling trees answered.

He had the strangest fancy that it was the tarn that was following him, the tarn slipping, sliding along the road, being with him so that he should not be lonely. He could almost hear the tarn whisper in his ear: "We did that together, and so I do not wish you to bear all the responsibility yourself. I will stay with you so that you are not lonely."

He climbed down the road toward home, and there were the lights of his house. He heard the gate click behind him as though it were shutting him in. He went into the sitting-room, lighted and ready. There were the books that Foster had admired.

The old woman who looked after him appeared. "Will you be having some tea, sir?"

"No, thank you, Annie."

"Will the other gentleman be wanting any?"

"No, the other gentleman is away for the night."

"Then there will be only one for supper?"

"Yes, only one for supper."

He sat in the corner of the sofa and fell instantly into a deep slumber.

V

He woke when the old woman tapped him on the shoulder and told him that supper was served. The room was dark save for the jumping light of two uncertain candles. Those two red candlesticks—how he hated them up there on the mantelpiece! He had always hated them and now they seemed to him to have something of the quality of Foster's voice, that thin, reedy, piping tone.

He was expecting at every moment that Foster would enter, and yet he knew that he would not. He continued to turn his head toward the door, but it was so dark there that you could not see. The whole room was dark except just there by the fireplace where the two candlesticks went whining with their miserable twinkling plaint.

He went into the dining-room and sat down to his meal. But he could not eat anything. It was odd, that place by the table where Foster's chair should be. Odd, naked, and made a man feel lonely.

He got up once from the table and went to the window, opened it and looked out. He listened for something. A trickle as of running water, a stir through the silence, as though some deep pool were filling to the brim. A rustle in the trees, perhaps. An owl hooted. Sharply, as though someone had spoken to him unexpectedly behind his shoulder, he closed the window and looked back, peering under his dark eyebrows into the room.

Later on he went to up bed . . .

Had he been sleeping, or had he been lying lazily, as one does, half-dozing, half-luxuriously, not-thinking? He was wide awake now, utterly awake, and his heart was beating with apprehension. It was as though someone had called him by name. He slept always with his window a little open and the blind up. Tonight the moonlight shadowed in sickly fashion the objects in his room. It was not a flood of light nor yet a sharp splash, silvering a square, a circle, throwing the rest into ebony darkness. The light was dim, a little green, perhaps, like the shadow that comes over the hills just before dark.

He stared at the window and it seemed to him that something moved there. Within, or rather against the green-gray light, something silver-tinted glistened. Fenwick stared. It had the look, exactly, of slipping water.

Slipping water! He listened, his head up, and it seemed to him that from beyond the window he

caught the stir of water, not running, but rather welling up and up, gurgling with satisfaction as it filled and filled.

He sat up higher in bed, and then saw that down the wallpaper beneath the window water was undoubtedly trickling. He could see it lurch to the projecting wood of the sill, pause, and then slip, slither down the incline. The odd thing was that it fell so silently.

He must get up and close the window. He drew his legs above the sheets and blankets and looked down.

He shrieked. The floor was covered with a shining film of water. It was rising. As he looked it had covered half the short stumpy legs of the bed. It rose without a wink, a bubble, a break! Over the sill it poured now in a steady flow, but soundless. Fenwick sat up in the bed, the clothes gathered up to his chin, his eyes blinking, the Adam's apple throbbing like a throttle in his throat.

But he must do something, he must stop this. The water was now level with the seats of the chairs, but still was soundless. Could he but reach the door!

He put down his naked foot, then cried again. The water was icy cold. Suddenly, leaning, staring at its dark, unbroken sheen, something seemed to push him forward. He fell. His head, his face was under the icy liquid; it seemed adhesive and, in the heart of its ice, hot like melting wax.

He struggled to his feet. The water was breast-high. He screamed again and again. He could see the looking glass, the row of books, the picture of Durer's *Horse,* aloof, impervious. He beat at the water and flakes of it seemed to cling to him like scales of fish, clammy to his touch. He struggled, ploughing his way toward the door.

The water now was at his neck. Then something had caught him by the ankle. Something held him. He struggled, crying: "Let me go! Let me go! I tell you to let me go! I hate you! I hate you! I will not come down to you! I will not——"

The water covered his mouth. He felt that someone pushed in his eyeballs with bare knuckles. A cold hand reached up and caught his naked thigh.

VI

In the morning the little maid knocked and, receiving no answer, came in, as was her wont, with his shaving-water. What she saw made her scream. She ran for the gardener.

They took the body with its staring, protruding eyes, its tongue sticking out between the clenched teeth, and laid it on the bed.

The only sign of disorder was an overturned water-jug. A small pool of water stained the carpet.

It was a lovely morning. A twig of ivy idly, in the little breeze, tapped the pane.

bullets, back to back

by . . . Frank Kane

Vic Cardell had a way with women —the arrogance of a gambler who hasn't yet had his bluff called.

SHE WAS no longer good to look at. What was left of her face was blackened cinder. The thick lustrous blonde hair had been burned away from her head, the lower part of her face and throat seared and charred. But the rest of her body, miraculously untouched, was lush, full-blown and beautiful.

Johnny Liddell stood at the window with the man from Homicide, watched while the medical examiner examined the body. Finally the medical man straightened up, nodded at McGinnis.

"How's it look to you, doc?" the loose-jointed redhead from Homicide wanted to know. He walked over to where the medical examiner stood scribbling on a tag.

"Accidental death, Mac." The doctor screwed the cap on his pen, stowed it in his breast pocket. "Unless you've got something I don't see."

McGinnis shrugged his shoulders, shook his head. "Just asking."

Liddell ambled over, stared down at the dead girl. "You'll be doing an autopsy, doc?"

The medical examiner looked

Frank Kane has the writing skill to make the characters of his fiction come alive, even the minor ones. And his famous shamus, Johnny Liddell, is one private-eye that devoted devotées of the modern hard-boiled school of writing will be more than glad to meet up with again, in this new yarn.

from Liddell to the Homicide man. McGinnis nodded. "It's okay, doc. This is Johnny Liddell. He's been working with the D.A.'s office on the Vic Cardell investigation." He dug into his jacket pocket, pulled out a blackened brier with a tobacco pouch, dug the bowl of the pipe into the pouch, started packing it with his index finger. "The D. A. will want you to give Liddell any lift you can."

The medical examiner nodded. "She mixed up in the Cardell mess?"

Liddell said, "She was the D. A.'s ace-in-the-hole. He was planning to put her in front of the Grand Jury today."

"Good break for Cardell," McGinnis grunted. He clamped the pipe between his teeth, touched a match to it. "A bad break for the D. A. He wants to make sure nobody's been stacking the cards."

"I don't see any evidence of it, Mac," the medical examiner shook his head. "The burns are certainly post mortem. She died from asphyxiation. Looks like she dropped a cigarette on her blanket and it smouldered until she breathed in enough carbon monoxide to kill her."

Lindell nodded. "In other words, an autopsy would probably show the same characteristics as if she'd been strangled?"

The medical examiner tapped the morgue tag against his thumb nail, pursed his lips, considered it. "At first glance, perhaps," he conceded. "But there's always external evidence in strangulation, bruises and—"

"Not if the throat and lower portion of the face were conveniently burned to hide such evidence," Liddell argued.

"Perhaps not. But what makes you think her throat and face were deliberately burned? Since the blanket did smoulder all night, it's a logical place for the burn. It was chilly during the night and she probably had the blanket pulled up to her neck."

"Will you make a simple check for me, doc?"

The medical examiner nodded.

"Check her pharynx and lungs for soot. If she was asphyxiated by a burning blanket, there'll be plenty of evidence."

The medical examiner looked at McGinnis, drew a nod. "Okay, Liddell. But I wouldn't count too much on it."

Liddell nodded. "How soon will you have something?"

"Not for five or six hours." The medical examiner checked his wrist-watch. "It's ten-thirty now. Try me around about four." He looped the tag around the girl's big toe, nodded to the men from his office, stepped aside as they approached with a stretcher. "Drop you any place, Mac? I'm going downtown."

The redhead said, "No, thanks. I'll stick around and see what this guy has perking in the back of his

skull." He rattled the juice in his pipe stem, blew a stream of smoke at the ceiling. "The inspector told me to keep an eye on him."

"Okay. Good to know you, Liddell. Hope I'll have something for you at four." The medical examiner waited until his men had disappeared through the doorway, handed McGinnis a receipt to initial. "You say this gal was going to testify against Cardell. She his girl?"

"Was." Liddell told him. "He found himself a new one and moved her out. She was getting back at him by testifying."

"Maybe you can get the new one to testify." The medical examiner grinned.

"I intend to try," Liddell said.

Johnny Liddell knocked on a door that had 4D stenciled on it in gilt. After a moment, he knocked again. There was no answer from within the apartment. He swore under his breath, rapped his knuckles against the door for the third time.

Finally, he heard a rustle inside. "Who's that?" a husky voice wanted to know.

"My name's Liddell. I've got to talk to you."

"What about?"

Liddell said, "Open up and find out. I'm from the D. A.'s office. You wouldn't want me to be yelling what I want from out here, would you?"

"Just a minute." There was the sound of a key being turned, then the door opened slightly. "You alone?"

"Just me, baby."

The door swung all the way open. The face matched the sultry voice. She was tall, almost as tall as Liddell's six feet. Her hair was thick, coppery, cascaded down over her shoulders in a molten stream. She wore a blue silk hostess gown that gleamed softly, did little to restrain the billowing curves of her figure. Her eyes were blue-green, her lips full and sensuous.

Liddell walked past her into a small but expensive looking living room. To the left were two doors, one leading to the kitchen the other to a bedroom. Directly ahead was a small balcony that looked out over Central Park. He tossed his hat at an end table, turned to face the girl.

"You hear from Cardell this morning?"

The green eyes narrowed. She walked over, selected a cigarette before she said, "Would you like to read my diary?"

"Diane Lewis is dead. Murdered," Liddell snapped at her.

The green eyes opened wide, the cigarette dropped from her fingers to the floor. "Murdered?" she whispered.

Liddell nodded. "She was due to go before the Grand Jury today. Vic made sure she wouldn't."

The girl made a production of bending to pick up the cigarette,

appeared not to notice the way her gown fell open. She was wearing a thin black silk nightgown under it. When she straightened up, she had herself under control again. "I'm sorry about Diane. But what do you want with me?"

"Help. We need facts to pin Cardell."

She laughed throatily but her eyes still bore traces of panic. "You mean you want me to go before your Grand Jury and lie Vic into jail?"

Liddell walked close to her, lifted the cigarette from between her fingers, lit it for her. "Get smart, baby. Vic's a bad boy. When he's finished with his toys, he busts hell out of them. Maybe you'd like to see how they look when he's—"

The redhead shook her head, backed away. "No!"

"She's not a pretty girl any more, baby. All that beautiful yellow hair is burned away, and her face—"

"Okay, Liddell. Turn it off." Vic Cardell stood in the doorway to the bedroom. He was thin in a way that heavily padded shoulders and careful tailoring failed to disguise. His thick black hair was parted in a three-quarter part that bared the startling whiteness of his scalp. His nose was large, hooked. His lips were thin, bloodless.

"I thought maybe you were here, Vic." Liddell grinned at the gambler. "No doubt the reason you didn't come out sooner is you were worried about her reputation."

"No doubt," Cardell sneered. "What do you want?"

"The guy who killed Diane Lewis," Liddell snapped. "I want the guy who strangled that kid, then set her on fire."

The girl gasped. Cardell scowled at her, flicked his thumb at the bedroom. "Get some clothes on."

The girl said, "No! I want to hear this. You told me—"

"Shut up!" Cardell growled at her. His button-like eyes hopscotched from the girl to Liddell. "Nobody murdered her. She died accidentally. You can't prove anything different, Liddell."

"I can try."

The thin lips split in what passed for a smile. "Go to it, pal." He jabbed a forefinger out at Liddell. "But don't think I'm forgetting all the heat you helped the D. A. put on me. As soon as it cools—"

Liddell grinned at him. "You're getting out of your league, Buster. Your speed is girls, remember?" He glanced at the redhead, his eyes cataloguing her obvious assets. "When it comes this baby's time, Vic, don't mess her up like you did Diane."

"It'll never be my time!" the girl shrilled. "Diane was crazy. If anything ever happens to me there'll be—"

Cardell was at her side in two

steps. His right hand whipped upward, caught her on the side of the face with a sharp crack, sending her reeling backward. "I told you to shut up."

When he turned back to face Liddell, his eyes glittered with hate. "Maybe I won't wait, shamus. Maybe I'll take care of you right here and now." His hand dipped into his jacket pocket, bulged suggestively.

"Don't, Vic!" The girl's voice was hoarse, her face drained of color. "You're crazy! You couldn't get away with it."

"Why not, baby? A suicide pact. You and the hotshot here decide you can't go on." His lips peeled back from his teeth. "One thing he said makes sense. Maybe you do know too much about my business." The smile faded, his eyes went bleak. "And he's getting in my hair."

"You think the D. A. would go for a suicide pact, Vic?" Liddell grunted. "He didn't fall for the fake accident on Diane."

"So what? He's got to prove it. And that he can't do. Nobody can."

"You did kill her then?" the girl demanded. "You killed her because you were through with her!" She looked wildly at Liddell. "Don't let him get away with it! He's going to kill us and—"

"That's what he thinks, baby. He's not getting away with anything. By now the police have the proof it was murder, not an accident. They're looking for him right now."

Cardell snarled, "It was an accident. They can't prove it wasn't."

Liddell grinned at him. "But they have, Vic. You were only half smart. You thought you destroyed proof that she was strangled by burning her throat."

The wolfish grin was back. "Not bad, eh Liddell? They can't find bruises in those ashes."

"They won't have to. There are other ways of proving she was already dead when the blanket was set on fire."

"How?"

"No soot in her lungs. There would have been plenty if she'd been alive while the blanket was burning."

Cardell licked at his thin lips. "They still can't tie it to me." His voice grew shrill. "They can't!"

"The police have a witness who'll swear to seeing you in her building."

"You are a liar!" Cardell screamed.

Liddell shook his head. "I'm not, but the witness is. He's all set to swear you into the hot seat. And there's nothing you can do about it, sucker."

Cardell's eyes raced wildly around the room, came to rest on the redhead. "Get over beside him," he snapped. His hand jerked out of his pocket, wrapped around a snub nosed .38.

The girl walked over to where Liddell stood, tried to grin for size, missed by a mile. "They'll get him for it, won't they?"

"Don't worry about it, baby." Liddell slid his arm around her waist. "We'll cool off with chilled champagne the night he burns."

"Don't make book on it, pal." Cardell raised the gun. "So long, sucker."

The boom of a police special sounded like a howitzer in the small room. Liddell dragged the girl down to the floor with him.

"Drop it, Cardell. I won't miss with the next one." The voice came from the balcony. Cardell swung, fired a shot at the window, sprinted for the kitchen door. As it slammed behind him, the redhead from Homicide swung his leg over the window sill, came in from the balcony.

"You two all right?" he asked.

Liddell nodded. "That shot of yours threw him off." He tugged his .45 from its holster. "There a back door out of the kitchen, baby?"

The redhead nodded.

"He won't get far," the detective said. "I've got a man on the back stairway."

There was a fusillade of shots, then silence. McGinnis sprinted for the back stairway, Liddell at his heels.

There was the snap of a .38 from the landing below and the big Homicide man folded in the middle. He tried to lift his gun, seemed to find it too heavy. It slipped from his fingers, clattered to the floor. Liddell caught him under the arms, dragged him back into the kitchen. An ugly, fast-spreading stain started to soak the front of McGinnis' shirt.

"He's down there on the landing. He must have shot Cary down there. Be careful, Liddell."

Liddell nodded, called the girl from the other room. "Make him comfortable, baby. And call for an ambulance."

The girl grabbed his arm. "Don't go after him. He's crazy. He'll kill you."

Liddell grinned at her. "Don't worry about me, baby. With something like you waiting, I'd walk across ten Cardells to get at it."

He crept on hands and knees to the back door, flattened out on the landing. There was no one on the landing below except the crumpled body of a big man in a dark suit. He crept down the stairs, .45 ready. At the foot of the steps he turned the body onto its back, recognized one of McGinnis' men. There was a bullet hole under the side of his jaw.

He stepped across the body, checked the door on the landing. Its lock had been blasted by a shot. He pushed the door open, stood aside, his .45 at ready. There was no sound from the apartment. After a moment, he went through the doorway. The apartment was empty.

The layout was identical to the redhead's. An open window leading to the balcony was a clear indication of where Cardell had gone.

He knelt down, applied one eye to the corner of the window. Cardell was at the end balcony, kicking his foot through a window. Liddell leveled the .45, squeezed the trigger.

Cardell stiffened, swung around, levelled his gun toward Liddell and fired. The bullet screeched off a metal support.

Liddell fired again. Cardell's body jerked. His gun dropped from his fingers. He clasped both hands across his stomach, lost his balance, disappeared over the side of the balcony. Somewhere a woman screamed shrilly . . .

McGinnis was propped comfortably in the living room chair in the redhead's apartment when Liddell got back up there.

"Get him?" McGinnis said.

Liddell nodded. "I shot him off the balcony. He was a real fancy high diver."

The girl came in from the kitchen, walked over to Liddell, melted against him. "I was afraid you weren't coming back."

"I had to. I left my hat here."

She reached up, put her lips against his mouth. Without moving away, she said. "And that ain't all."

McGinnis groaned. "Look, it's tough enough to have a bullet in me without having to sit through that." He waited until the redhead had moved away from Liddell. "You'll help the D. A. smash Cardell's set-up?"

The girl nodded.

"What was Cardell doing here, by the way?" Liddell asked her.

She shrugged. "It's not what you think. He just dropped by to ask me to alibi him for last night, if he needed it. He said he got a tip about Diane being killed and he figured the D. A. might try to frame him."

The telephone in the foyer began ringing. The girl walked over to it, her rounded hips working smoothly against the fabric of the robe. She answered, then held it out to Liddell. "It's for McGinnis."

"Take it, Johnny. And tell them to rush that ambulance."

Liddell took the phone, listened. After a moment, he hung up. "The ambulance is on the way. And we got the report from the medical examiner."

"So?"

Liddell grinned. "Her lungs were full of soot. She wasn't strangled. She really did suffocate from the smoke. Cardell didn't finish the job."

McGinnis scowled. "If he hadn't made a run for it, he could have beaten the rap. He didn't know it, but he was sitting with aces back to back."

"That's what paid off—bullets, back to back."

the coming of mr. quin

by . . . Agatha Christie

A man had died mysteriously in this house where a ghost walks. And tonight—ten years later—Mr. Quin solves an old enigma.

IT WAS New Year's Eve.

The elder members of the house party at Royston were assembled in the big hall.

Mr. Satterthwaite was glad that the young people had gone to bed. He was not fond of young people in herds. He thought them uninteresting and crude. They lacked subtlety and as life went he had become increasingly fond of subtleties.

Mr. Satterthwaite was sixty-two, a little bent, dried-up man with a peering face oddly elflike, and an intense and inordinate interest in other people's lives. All his life, so to speak, he had sat in the front row of the stalls watching various dramas of human nature unfold before him. His role had always been that of the onlooker. Only now, with old age holding him in its clutch, he found himself increasingly critical of the drama submitted to him. He demanded now something a little out of the common.

There was no doubt that he had a flair for these things. He knew instinctively when the elements of drama were at hand. Like a war horse, he sniffed the

Originality, that quality most sought after and seldom found in crime stories, is a hallmark of Agatha Christie's work. Combined with an ability to concoct plots that baffle and at the same time violate all the dogmas of detective fiction, this magic has kept England's American-born scribbler in the vanguard of world-famous mystery authors for many years.

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scent. Since his arrival at Royston this afternoon, that strange inner sense of his had stirred and bid him be ready. Something interesting was happening or going to happen.

The house party was not a large one. There was Tom Evesham their genial good-humored host and his serious, political wife who had been, before her marriage, Lady Laura Keene. There was Sir Richard Conway, soldier, traveller and sportsman, there were six or seven young people whose names Mr. Satterthwaite had not grasped, and there were the Portals.

It was the Portals who interested Mr. Satterthwaite.

He had never met Alec Portal before but he knew all about him, had known his father and his grandfather. Alec Portal ran pretty true to type. He was a man of close on forty, fair-haired, and blue eyed like all the Portals, fond of sport, good at games, devoid of imagination. Nothing unusual about Alec Portal. The usual, good, sound English stock.

But his wife was different. She was, Mr. Satterthwaite knew, an Australian. Portal had been out in Australia two years ago, had met her out there, had married her and brought her home. She had never been to England before her marriage. All the same, she wasn't at all like any other Australian woman Mr. Satterthwaite had met.

He observed her now covertly. Interesting woman—very. So still, and yet so—alive. Alive! That was just it! Not exactly beautiful—no, you wouldn't call her beautiful, but there was a kind of calamitous magic about her that you couldn't miss, that no man could miss. The masculine side of Mr. Satterthwaite spoke there. But the feminine side (for Mr. Satterthwaite had a large share of femininity), was equally interested in another question. *Why did Mrs. Portal dye her hair?*

Most men probably would not know that she dyed her hair. But Mr. Satterthwaite knew. He had a woman's instinct about those things. Many dark women dye their hair blond; but he had never before come across a fair woman who dyed her hair black.

Everything about her intrigued him. In a queer intuitive way, he felt certain that she was either very happy or very unhappy, but he didn't know which, and it annoyed him not to know. Furthermore there was the curious effect she had upon her husband.

"He adores her," said Mr. Satterthwaite to himself, "but he also seems—yes, *afraid* of her! That's very interesting! That's uncommonly interesting!"

Portal drank too much. That was certain. And he had a curious way of watching his wife when she wasn't looking.

"Nerves," said Mr. Satter-

thwaite. "The fellow's all nerves. She knows it too, but she doesn't seem to do anything about it."

He felt very curious about the pair of them. Something was going on between them that he couldn't fathom.

He was roused from his meditations on the subject by the solemn chiming of a big clock.

"Twelve o'clock," said Evesham. "New Year's Day. Happy New Year everybody! As a matter of fact that clock's five minutes fast. I don't know why the children wouldn't wait up and see the New Year in."

"I don't suppose they've really gone to bed," said his wife placidly. "They're probably putting hairbrushes or something in our beds. That sort of thing does so amuse them. I can't think why. We would never have been allowed to do such a thing in my young day."

"Other times, other manners," said Conway, smiling.

He was a tall, soldierly-looking man. Both he and Evesham were much of the same type, honest, upright, kindly men with no great pretensions to brains.

"In my young days we all joined hands in a circle and sang 'Auld Lang Syne!" continued Lady Laura, " 'Should Auld Acquaintance be forgot'—so touching, I always think the words are."

Evesham moved uneasily. "Oh, drop it, Laura," he muttered. *"Not here!"*

He strode across the wide hall where they were sitting, switched on an extra light.

"Very stupid of me," said Lady Laura, sotto voce. "Reminds him of poor Mr. Capel, of course. My dear, is the fire too hot for you?"

Eleanor Portal had made an abrupt movement. "Thank you. I'll move my chair back a little," she said quietly.

What a lovely voice she had. One of those low, echoing voices that stay in your memory, thought Mr. Satterthwaite. Her face was in shadow now. What a pity.

From her place in the shadow she spoke again. "Mr. Capel? Who is he?"

"The man who originally owned this house. He shot himself, you know . . . Very well, Tom dear, I won't speak of it. It was a great shock to Tom, of course, because he was here when it happened. So were you, weren't you, Sir Richard?"

"Yes, Lady Laura."

An old grandfather clock in the corner groaned, wheezed, snorted asthmatically, then struck twelve.

"Happy New Year," Evesham said prefunctorily.

Lady Laura folded her knitting with some deliberation. "Well, we've seen the New Year in," she observed, and added, looking towards Mrs. Portal, "What do you think, my dear? Shall we—"

Eleanor Portal rose quickly to her feet. "Bed, by all means," she said lightly.

"She's very pale," thought Mr. Satterthwaite, as he too rose and began busying himself with candlesticks. "She's not usually as pale as that."

He lighted her candle and handed it to her with a little old fashioned bow. She took it from him with a word of thanks, and went slowly up the stairs.

Suddenly an odd impulse swept over Mr. Satterthwaite. He wanted to go after her, to reassure her. He had the strangest feeling that she was in danger of some kind. He rejected the impulse, felt annoyance with himself. He was getting nervy, too!

She hadn't looked at her husband as she went up the stairs. But at the first landing she stopped, turned her head over her shoulder and gave him a long, searching, intense look. It sent a sudden tension through Mr. Satterthwaite.

He found himself saying good night to his hostess in a rather flustered manner.

"I'm sure I hope it will be a happy New Year," Lady Laura was saying. "But for the political situation I'm sure it would be."

"I'm sure it will be," said Mr. Satterthwaite earnestly. "I'm sure it will be happy."

"I only hope," repeated Lady Laura, without enthusiasm, "that it will be a dark man who first crosses the threshold. You know the superstition, I suppose, Mr. Satterthwaite? No? You surprise me. To bring luck to the house it must be a dark man who first steps through the door on New Year's Day. Dear me, I hope I shan't find anything *very* unpleasant in my bed. I never trust children. They have such very high spirits."

Shaking her head in sad foreboding, Lady Laura moved majestically up the staircase.

With the departure of the women, the men pulled their chairs in closer round the blazing logs on the open hearth.

"Say when," said Evesham hospitably as he held up the whisky decanter.

When everybody had said when, the talk reverted to the subject which had been tabooed before.

"You knew Derek Capel, didn't you, Satterthwaite?" asked Conway.

"Slightly."

"And you, Portal?"

"No! I never met him."

So fiercely and defensively did he say it that Mr. Satterthwaite looked up in surprise.

"I always hate it when Laura brings up the subject," said Evesham slowly. "After the tragedy, you know, this place was sold to a big manufacturer. He cleared out after a year. A lot of tommy-rot was talked about the place being haunted, and it gave the

house a bad name. Then, when Laura got me into West Kidleby politics of course it meant living up in these parts, and it wasn't easy to find a suitable house. After being vacant for so long the asking price for Royston was cheap, and—well, in the end I bought it. Of course, ghosts are tommyrot. But all the same you don't exactly care to be reminded that you're living in a house where one of your own friends shot himself. Poor old Derek! And we shall never know why he did it."

"He isn't the first and won't be the last fellow who's shot himself without leaving a reason," said Alec Portal heavily.

He rose and poured himself another drink, splashing the whisky in with a liberal hand.

"There's something wrong with him," said Mr. Satterthwaite to himself. "Very wrong indeed. I wish I knew what it is."

"Gad!" said Conway. "Listen to that wind. It's a wild night!"

"A good night for ghosts to walk," said Portal with a reckless laugh. "All the devils in Hell are probably abroad tonight."

"According to Lady Laura, only the blackest of them will bring us luck," observed Conway, with a laugh. Then: "Listen to that!"

The wind rose in a wild, shrill wail that held its high note a long tense moment. As it died away there came three loud knocks—on the big front door.

Everyone jumped at the sound.

"Who on earth can that be at this time of night?" cried Evesham, getting slowly to his feet.

They stared at each other.

"I'll have to open it," said Evesham. "The servants have gone to bed." He strode across to the door, fumbled a little over the heavy lock, finally flung it open. An icy blast of wind swept into the hall.

In the doorway stood a man. He was tall and thin. To Mr. Satterthwaite he appeared, by some curious effect of the stained glass above the door, to be dressed in every color of the rainbow. Then, as he stepped into the hall, he showed himself to be a dark man dressed in hunting clothes.

"I apologize for this intrusion," said the stranger, in a pleasant, level voice. "But my car broke down. Nothing serious. My chauffeur is fixing it, but it will take half an hour or so, and it is so confoundedly cold outside—"

He broke off, and Evesham spoke up quickly.

"Quite right. Come in and have a drink. We can't give you any assistance about the car?"

"No, thanks. My man knows what to do. By the way, my name is Quin—Harley Quin."

"Sit down, Mr. Quin," said Evesham. "Sir Richard Conway, Mr. Satterthwaite, Mr. Portal. My name is Evesham."

Mr. Quin acknowledged the

introductions, and dropped into the chair that Evesham had hospitably pulled forward. As he sat, some effect of the firelight threw a bar of shadow across his face, giving almost the impression of a mask.

Evesham threw more logs on the fire.

"A drink?"

"Thanks."

Evesham brought it to him and asked as he did so: "Do you know this part of the world well, Mr. Quin?"

"I passed through it some years ago."

"Really?"

"Yes. This house belonged then to a man called Capel."

"Ah! yes," said Evesham. "Poor Derek Capel. You knew him?"

"Yes, I knew him."

Evesham's manner underwent a faint change, imperceptible to one who did not know the English character. Before, it had contained a subtle reserve; now this was laid aside. Mr. Quin had known Derek Capel. He was the friend of a friend, and as such was vouched for and fully accredited.

"Astounding coincidence," Evesham said confidentially. "We were just talking about Capel. I can tell you, it went against the grain, buying this place. If there had been anything else suitable I wouldn't have done so. You see, I was in the house the night he shot himself—so was Conway—and upon my word, I've always expected his ghost to walk."

"A very strange business," Quin spoke slowly and deliberately, then paused with the air of an actor who has spoken an important cue.

"Strange is the word for it," burst in Conway. "The thing's a black mystery, that's what it is."

"I wonder," said Mr. Quin, noncommittally.

"Astounding," Sir Richard put in. "That's what it was. Here's a man in the prime of life, gay, light-hearted, without a care in the world. Five or six old pals staying with him. Top of his spirits at dinner, full of plans for the future. And from the dinner table he goes straight upstairs to his room, takes a revolver from a drawer and shoots himself. Why? Nobody knows. Nobody ever will know."

"Isn't that rather a sweeping statement, Sir Richard?" asked Mr. Quin smiling.

Conway stared at him. "What d'you mean?"

"A problem is not necessarily unsolvable because it has remained unsolved."

"Oh! Come, man, if nothing came out at the time, it's not likely to come out now, ten years afterwards?"

Mr. Quin shook his head gently. "I disagree with you. The evidence of history is against you. The contemporary historian never writes such a true history as the

historian of a later generation. It is a question of getting the true perspective, of seeing things in proportion. It is, like everything else, a question of relativity."

Alec Portal leaned forward, his face twitching.

"You are right, Mr. Quin!" he cried. "You are right! Time does not dispose of a question. It only presents it anew in a different guise."

Evesham was smiling tolerantly. "You mean to say, Mr. Quin, that if we were to hold a Court of Inquiry tonight, into the circumstances of Derek Capel's death, we are as likely to arrive at the truth now as we should have been at the time of his death ten years ago?"

"*More* likely, Mr. Evesham. The personal equation has largely dropped out, and you will remember facts as facts without emotional interpretation of them."

Evesham frowned doubtfully.

"One must have a starting point, of course," said Mr. Quin in his quiet, level voice. "A starting point is usually a theory. One of you must have a theory, I am sure. How about you, Sir Richard?"

"Well, of course," Conway said apologetically, "we thought—we all thought—that there must be a woman in it somewhere. It's usually either a woman or money, isn't it? And it certainly wasn't money. He had plenty of that. So, it must have been a woman."

Mr. Satterthwaite started. He had leaned forward to contribute a small remark of his own and, in doing so he had caught sight of a woman's figure crouched against the balustrade of the gallery above. She was huddled down against it, invisible from everywhere but where he himself sat, and she was evidently listening with strained attention to what was going on below. So immovable was she that he hardly believed the evidence of his own eyes.

But he recognized the pattern of the dress easily enough, the old-world brocade worn that evening by Eleanor Portal.

And suddenly all the events of the night seemed to fall into pattern—Mr. Quin's arrival, no fortuitous chance, but the appearing of an actor when his cue was given. There was a drama being played in the big hall at Royston tonight, a drama nonetheless real because one of the actors was dead. Oh, yes, Derek Capel had a part in the play. An important part. Mr. Satterthwaite was sure of that.

And, suddenly a new idea came to him. This was Mr. Quin's doing! It was he who was taking the play, giving the actors their cues. He held the key to the mystery, he pulled the strings, making the puppets work. He knew everything, probably even knew of the presence of the

woman crouched against the woodwork upstairs. Yes, he knew! Mr. Satterthwaite was sure of it.

Sitting well back in his chair, in his role of audience, Mr. Satterthwaite watched the drama unfold before his eyes. Quietly Mr. Quin was pulling the strings, setting his puppets in motion.

"A woman, yes," he murmured. "There was no mention of any woman at the dinner ten years ago?"

"Why, of course!" cried Evesham. "Capel announced his engagement that night. That's what made it seem so insane, his committing suicide. Very bucked about it he was. Said it wasn't to be publicly announced just yet. But he gave us the hint that he was in the running for the Benedick stakes."

"Of course we all guessed who the lady was," said Conway. "At least we thought it was Marjorie Dilke. Nice girl, Marjorie."

It seemed to be Mr. Quin's turn to speak, but he did not do so, and something about his silence was oddly provocative. It was as though he challenged Conway's statement. It had the effect of putting Conway in a defensive position.

"Who else could it have been? Eh, Evesham?" Conway said, suddenly anxious.

"I don't know," said Tom Evesham slowly. "What did he say exactly? Something about being in the running for the Benedick stakes, that he couldn't tell us the lady's name till he had her permission. He said, I remember, that he was a damned lucky fellow. That he wanted his two old friends to know that by that time next year he'd be a happily married man. Of course, we assumed it was Marjorie. They were great friends and he was with her a lot."

"The only thing—" began Conway and stopped.

"What were you going to say, Dick?"

"Well, I mean, it was odd, in a way, if it was Marjorie, that the engagement wasn't announced at once. I mean, why the secrecy? That's the sort of thing you do if it's a married woman—you know, a woman whose husband had just died, or who is divorcing him."

"That's true," said Evesham. "In that case, of course the engagement couldn't be announced at once. And thinking back about it, I don't believe he had been seeing much of Marjorie that year. All that was the year before. I remember thinking things seemed to have cooled off between them."

"Curious," said Mr. Quin.

"Yes, it looked almost as though someone had come between them."

"Another woman," said Conway thoughtfully.

"By Jove!" said Evesham. "You know, there was something almost indecently hilarious about

old Derek that night. He looked almost drunk with happiness. And yet—it's hard to explain what I mean—but he looked oddly defiant, too."

"Like a man defying Fate," said Alec Portal heavily.

Was it of Derek Capel he was speaking or was it of himself? Mr. Satterthwaite, looking at him, was inclined to believe that was what Alec Portal represented—a man defying Fate.

Mr. Satterthwaite looked up toward the staircase. She was still there. Watching, listening, motionless, frozen—like a dead woman.

"Perfectly true," said Conway. "Capel *was* excited, curiously so. I'd describe him as a man who has staked heavily and won against overwhelming odds."

"Getting up courage, perhaps, for what he's made up his mind to do?" suggested Portal.

And as though moved by an association of ideas, he got up and helped himself to another drink.

"Not a bit of it," said Evesham sharply. "I'd swear nothing of that kind was in his mind. Conway's right. He was like a successful gambler who hit a long shot and can hardly believe in his own good fortune. That was the attitude."

Conway gave a gesture of discouragement. "And yet," he said. "Ten minutes later he killed himself."

They sat in silence. Then Evesham brought his hand down with a bang on the table.

"Something must have happened in that ten minutes!" he cried. "It must! But what? Let's go over it carefully. We were all talking. In the middle of it Capel got up suddenly and left the room—"

"Why?" said Mr. Quin. "What reason did he give?"

The interruption seemed to disconcert Evesham. He frowned in an effort of memory.

"It didn't seem vital, at the time. Oh! I remember now! Don't you remember that jangling door bell, and how excited we were? We'd been snowed in for three days, remember? Biggest snowstorm for years. All the roads impassable. No newspapers, no mail. Capel went out to see if something had come through at last, and he came back with a great pile of newspapers and letters. He opened the paper to see the news—no radio then, you know—then went upstairs with his letters. A few minutes later we heard a shot. Inexplicable! Absolutely inexplicable!"

"That's not inexplicable," said Portal. "Of course the fellow got some unexpected news in a letter. Bad news. Obvious, I should have said."

Evesham shook his head. "Don't think we missed anything so obvious as that. It was one of the coroner's first questions. *But*

Capel never opened one of his letters. The whole pile lay unopened on his desk."

Portal looked disappointed. "You're sure he didn't open just one of them? He might have destroyed it after reading it? Did you think of that?"

"No, I'm positive. We thought of that, too. There was no sign of a recently burned paper. No, every one of the letters was unopened. Nothing burnt, nothing torn up. There was no fire in the room."

Portal shook his head. "Extraordinary!"

"It was a ghastly business," said Evesham in a low voice. "Conway and I went up when we heard the shot, and found him. It gave us a shock, I can tell you."

"You telephoned for the police, I suppose?" said Mr. Quin.

"Royston didn't have a telephone then. I had one put in when I bought the place. But, luckily enough, the local constable happened to be in the kitchen at the time. One of the dogs—you remember poor old Rover, Conway?—had strayed the day before. Somebody had found it half buried in a snowdrift and had taken it to the police station. They recognized it as Capel's and the constable came up with it. He'd just arrived a minute before the shot was fired. It saved us some trouble."

"Gad, that was a snowstorm," said Conway, reminiscently. "About this time of year, wasn't it? Early January."

"February, I think. Let me see, we went abroad soon afterwards and then . . ."

"I'm pretty sure it was January. My horse, Ned—you remember Ned?—lamed himself the end of January. That was just after this business."

"It must have been the end of January then. Funny how difficult it is to recall dates after a lapse of ten years."

"One of the most difficult things in the world," said Mr. Quin, conversationally. "Unless you can recall a landmark in some big public event—an assassination of a crowned head, or a big murder trial . . ."

"Why, of course!" cried Conway. "It was just before the Appleton case began."

"Just after, wasn't it?"

"No, no, don't you remember? Capel knew the Appletons. He'd visited the old man the previous Spring, just a week before he died. He was talking of him that night, about what an old grouch he was, and how awful it was for a young and beautiful woman like Mrs. Appleton to be married to him. There was no suspicion then that she had murdered him."

"By Jove, you're right! I remember reading the story in the paper saying an exhumation order had been granted. It was that same day! And it was in one of the newspapers that poor Derek

had carried upstairs with the mail! I forgot about it completely, of course, after we found Derek lying dead upstairs."

"A common phenomenon, that," observed Mr. Quin. "In moments of great stress the mind focuses itself upon some quite unimportant matter which is remembered long afterward with the utmost fidelity, driven in, as it were, by the mental stress of the moment. It may be some irrelevant detail, like the pattern of a wallpaper, but it will never be forgotten."

"Rather extraordinary, your saying that, Mr. Quin," said Conway. "As you were speaking, I suddenly felt myself back in Derek Capel's room, with Derek lying there dead on the floor. I saw as plainly as I see you now the big tree outside the window, and the shadow it threw upon the snow outside. The moonlight, the snow, and the shadow of the tree, I can see them again this minute, yet I never realised I was looking at them at the time!"

"His room was the big one over the porch, just at the angle of the drive."

Mr. Quin nodded, looked satisfied. Mr. Satterthwaite felt strangely thrilled. He felt that every word, every reflection of Mr. Quin's voice was filled with purpose. He was driving at something!

There was a slight pause, then Evesham spoke.

"That Appleton case, I remember it very well now. What a sensation it made! She was found not guilty, wasn't she? Pretty woman, I recall. A blonde. A remarkably fair one."

Mr. Satterthwaite's eyes shifted to the kneeling figure above. Was it his fancy, or did he see a hand slide upward to the tablecloth, then pause?

There was a sudden crash of falling glass. Alec Portal, helping himself to whisky, had let the decanter slip.

"I say—damn sorry! Can't think what came over me."

Evesham cut short his apologies. "Quite all right. Quite all right, my dear fellow. Curious, that smash reminded me of something. That's what she did, didn't she? Mrs. Appleton? Smashed the wine decanter?"

"Yes. Old Appleton took one glass of port each night. The day after his death one of the servants saw her take the decanter out and smash it deliberately. That set them talking, of course. They all knew she had been miserable with him. Rumour grew and grew, and in the end, months later, one of his relatives applied for an exhumation order. And sure enough, the old fellow had been poisoned. Arsenic, wasn't it?"

"No—strychnine, I think. Well, of course, there it was. Only one person was likely to have done it. Mrs. Appleton was

tried for it. She was acquitted more through lack of evidence against her than from any overwhelming proof of innocence. In other words, she was lucky. I suppose there's not much doubt she did it. What happened to her afterward?"

"Went out to Canada, I believe. Or was it Australia? She had an uncle or something of the sort out there who offered her a home. Best thing she could do under the circumstances."

Mr. Satterthwaite was fascinated by Alec Portal's right hand. It clasped his glass so tightly the knuckles were white knobs.

"It'll smash in a minute or two," thought Mr. Satterthwaite. "Dear me, how interesting!"

Evesham said, "Well, we're not much nearer to knowing why poor Derek Capel shot himself." He laughed. "The Court of Inquiry hasn't been a great success, has it, Mr. Quin?"

Mr. Quin laughed, too. It was a strange laugh, mocking yet sad. Then he said, "You are living in the past, Mr. Evesham. You are still hampered by your preconceived notion. But I, the man from outside, the stranger passing by, I see only facts!"

"Facts? What facts?"

"I see a clear sequence of facts, of which you have not seen the significance. Let us go back ten years and look at the facts—untrammelled by emotion or sentiment."

Mr. Quin rose to his feet, moved to stand before the fireplace. He looked very tall. The fire leaped fitfully behind him. He spoke in a low, compelling voice.

"You are at dinner. Derek Capel announces his engagement. You think he means to Marjorie Dilke. You are not so sure now. He has the restlessly excited manner of a man who has successfully defied Fate—who, in your own words, has pulled off a big coup against overwhelming odds. Then the doorbell rings. He goes out to get the long overdue mail. He doesn't open his letters, but you all recall that *he opened the paper to glance at the news!* It is ten years ago. Offhand we do not know what the big news was that day—a far off earthquake, a near at hand political crisis? The only thing we do know about the contents of that paper is that it contained a small paragraph stating that the police had given permission to exhume the body of Mr. Appleton three days ago."

All eyes were on Mr. Quin now. No one moved. Mr. Quin went on.

"Derek Capel goes up to his room. Perhaps he sees something outside the window. Conway has told us that the curtain was not drawn across it and that it overlooked the drive. What did he see? What could he have seen that made him take his life?"

"What do you mean? What

did he see?" Conway's voice broke in.

"I think," said Mr. Quin deliberately, "that he saw a policeman. It was the policeman who had come to return the dog. But Derek Capel didn't know that. He just saw a policeman."

There was a long silence, as though it took some time to drive the inference home.

"My God!" whispered Evesham at last. "You can't mean—Appleton? But he wasn't there at the time Appleton died! The old man was alone with his wife . . ."

"But he may have been there a week earlier. Strychnine is not very soluble unless it is in the form of the hydrochloride. The greater part of it, put into the port, would be taken in the last glass, perhaps, a week after it was put into the bottle."

Portal sprang to his feet. His voice was hoarse, his eyes wild. "Why did she break the decanter?" he cried. "Why did she break the decanter? Tell me that!"

For the first time that evening, Mr. Quin addressed himself to Mr. Satterthwaite.

"You have a wide experience of life, Mr. Satterthwaite. Perhaps you can tell us that."

Mr. Satterthwaite knew that his cue had come at last. He was now to speak his lines in the play. He was to be an actor now, not a looker on.

"As I see it," he said modestly, "she loved Derek Capel. She was a good woman and she had sent him away. But when her husband died, she suspected the truth—that Capel had poisoned the port that only her husband drank. So, to save the man she loved, she destroyed the evidence against him. Later, I think, he persuaded her that her suspicions were unfounded, and she agreed to marry him."

Mr. Satterthwaite stopped speaking. Suddenly a long trembling sigh filled the air.

"My God!" cried Evesham, starting. "What was that?"

Mr. Satterthwaite could have told him that it was Eleanor Portal in the gallery above. But he said nothing.

Mr. Quin spoke up, diverted their attention.

"My car will be ready by now. Thank you for your hospitality, Mr. Evesham. It has been a most interesting evening."

They all stared at him. Evesham spoke first.

"Wait," he said. "Your friend Derek—he loved this woman, you know. Loved her enough to commit murder for her. When retribution overtook him, as he mistakenly thought, he killed himself. But, unwittingly, he left her to face the music."

"She was acquitted."

"Only because the case against her could not be proved. And I fancy that—somewhere, somehow—she is still facing the music."

Portal dropped into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

Quin spoke to Satterthwaite, ignoring the others.

"Goodbye, Mr. Satterthwaite. You are interested in the drama, are you not?"

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded.

"I recommend the Harlequinade to your attention. It is not popular nowadays, but it repays attention, I assure you. Its symbolism is a little difficult to follow —but immortals are always immortal, you know. I wish you all good night."

They watched as he opened the big door, saw him stride out into the dark.

As one man, they turned to refill their glasses. All but Mr. Satterthwaite. Excusing himself, Mr. Satterthwaite went upstairs.

In his room he went quickly to the open window. The figure of Mr. Quin moved down the drive. And as he watched a woman's figure, running, came from a side door and flew after Mr. Quin. For a moment they spoke together, then she retraced her steps to the house. She passed just below the window, and Mr. Satterthwaite was struck anew by the vitality of her face. She moved like a woman in a dream. But her face radiated happiness.

"Eleanor!"

Alec Portal stepped from the doorway below, caught her arm.

"Eleanor, forgive me! Forgive me! You told the truth, but, God forgive me, I did not quite believe . . ."

Mr. Satterthwaite was intensely interested in other people's affairs, but he was also a gentleman. Instinctively he shut the window.

But he shut it very slowly.

He heard her voice, exquisite, vibrant.

"I know! You have been in Hell! So was I—once. Loving—yet alternately believing and suspecting—thrusting aside one's doubts and having them spring up again . . . I know, Alec, I know! But there is a worse Hell than that, the Hell I have lived with you. I have seen your doubt, your fear of me, poisoning our love. That man—that chance passerby, saved me. I could bear it no longer, Alec. Tonight—tonight I was going to kill myself! Alec—Alec!"

a most reliable witness

by . . . Tom Lake

T'was a fool-proof murder design
—it simply over-looked women.

"IT IS QUITE possible to commit a perfect murder," said John Thorpe, "I might even say simple. The trouble is that, in addition to cleverness and craftsmanship, the murderer needs a degree of omniscience that no one possesses this side of heaven."

We all showed our surprise, I'm afraid. Never before had Thorpe joined our Friday night gatherings at which the club's two giants of detective fiction, Samuel Enterprise and Hall Radley, presided.

I had noticed Thorpe, stolid and portly manufacturer of woolen goods, when he arrived earlier, looking rather depressed. He had ordered two double whiskies in quick succession, which was unusual for him.

"Ah!" said the burly Enterprise, peering across the table to look into Thorpe's eyes. "Then you have *practical* experience of the art of murder?"

"I have," said Thorpe.

The silence that followed was shattered by a sudden high-pitched laugh from Skilton, the club's junior bore.

Thorpe squeezed his body into a vacant armchair and glowered at us. "I imagine," he said, "that I am the only murderer in the

English writers are noted for their objective and analytical handling of stories about crime and criminals. This new, little story needed that sort of treatment, and Tom Lake, being British, shows just how it should be done.

present company." Having captured our startled interest, he seemed now to enjoy himself.

"And," asked Samuel Enterprise, "was it a perfect murder?"

"In so far as its execution was concerned, yes," said Thorpe.

There was another pause. We were all a bit inhibited by surprise. Then Thorpe said, "I don't think any of you have ever met my wife, A pretty young thing, but inclined to hysteria, and impressionable, yes, impressionable. Still, I adore her."

He sipped his double whiskey. We waited. He said, "Any of you fellows know a young cad-about-town named Henry Haylton? No? Just as well there are no friends of his here, I suppose, for it was he I murdered. He had become far too friendly with my wife.

"As in all murders, the main problem was to give myself an alibi." He leaned forward towards us. "And this is where I think you will agree I was cleverer than most. Where most killers try to prove they were as far as possible from the scene of the murder, I arranged to be present—as close as I am now to that steward over there—yet with two witnesses to say I couldn't have done it."

"How?" asked Enterprise.

"I'll tell you the story as I told it to the police. I'll merely preface it by saying my house is isolated from its neighbors by several hundred yards, and, though having extensive grounds at the rear, has only a small garden separating it from the street.

"I chose a mid-winter's day, when darkness came early, and there was no moon. I had given the cook and butler, who are husband and wife, the evening off, leaving only one maid in to serve drinks.

"I had arranged a dinner in town, with theatre afterwards. Haylton was to come early, have drinks with us, then drive us into town in his car. The other member of the party, and my most important witness, was Lady Harreston, the widow of Sir Josiah Harreston, Bart."

"I know her," said Samuel Enterprise. "A beautiful and talented young lady."

Thorpe nodded. "But more important for my purpose, a most respectable lady, whose word any court would take as gospel truth.

"Well, this is exactly what happened: My wife and I and Lady Harreston, who had had lunch with us, were waiting for Haylton in the library. At the time he was due, I moved to the window overlooking the street. Presently a car arrived. I said: 'This must be Henry, now.'

"It was almost dark, and I could just distinguish his figure as he got out of the car. A moment later there was a shot—from outside. My wife screamed. I peered through the window, said: 'My God, somebody's shot Henry.' At that my wife fainted,

which was exactly what I'd expected. Leaving Lady Harreston, who was looking very pale herself but retained wonderful self-control, to take care of her, I hurried outside.

"Just pausing to take a quick glance at Haylton, who was sprawled face-down on the steps, I rushed towards the gate. Now I'm not a brave man, and I suddenly remembered I was unarmed. So I suddenly veered towards the tree that stands just inside our garden wall, and from behind its trunk I tried to see any sign of an assailant. I saw none, nor did I hear any footsteps.

"Haylton was dead, so I left him where he was and phoned the police. My story was, of course, confirmed by both my wife and Lady Harreston. The police had no alternative but to assume that he was murdered by someone who had shot him from the street as he was about to enter my house."

"And yet you say *you* killed him, and without an accomplice?" I exclaimed.

"I did," said Thorpe. He chuckled. "I actually *aimed the gun that shot him.*"

Samuel Enterprise slapped his thigh. "A guntrap!" he said admiringly.

"Right, sir," said Thorpe.

"Let me see," said Enterprise. "The gun was fixed to the tree, a thread attached to the trigger—"

"Yes," said Thorpe, excitement in his voice. "The revolver—which, incidentally, I acquired earlier from a secret source—was fixed to the tree by a simple piece of stiff wire. The thread—ordinary black cotton thread—ran from the trigger diagonally across the steps to the farther balustrade . . ."

"And the revolver was aimed along the thread," exclaimed Enterprise. "So that, at whatever point he touched it, he'd be in the line of fire."

"Exactly."

"All very well, so far," said Hall Radley. "But how did you dispose of the evidence?"

"Simply," answered Thorpe. "Haylton had broken the thread in his fall. The first piece I removed from the balustrade as I bent over the body. The rest I gathered up as I hid behind the tree. I put the pieces in my pocket and dropped them into the fire while Lady Harreston and the maid were escorting my wife to her bedroom."

"Yes, yes," said Radley, impatiently. "But you couldn't burn a revolver or a piece of wire."

"Of course not," said Thorpe placidly. "The wire I simply rolled into a ball and placed in the garbage can, which was ready for emptying in the morning. What significance could the police attach to a piece of old twisted wire in a garbage can, even if they had found it? As for the gun—well, what would you have made one

of your fictional murderers do with it, Mr. Radley?"

Hall Radley frowned. "In the garbage can, too?" Thorpe shook his head.

"Buried it!" exclaimed Skilton, with triumph.

"No," said Enterprise. "You threw it over the garden wall, into the street, copying the not uncommon action of murderers in discarding their weapons at or near the scene of the crime."

"No," said Thorpe. "I put it in my pocket. I had it in my pocket all the time I was questioned by the police." He smiled at our surprised faces.

"What had I to fear? Lady Harreston and my wife had told them Haylton was shot from outside while I was in the house, so why should they be interested in the contents of my pockets? After they had gone, I locked the gun in a drawer in my desk, locked my study, and put the keys in my pocket. It could stay there until I found it convenient to dispose of it."

Hall Radley caressed the tip of his long nose between forefinger and thumb. "How long ago did this perfect murder occur, Mr. Thorpe?' he asked.

Thorpe looked at his watch. "Eleven-thirty now," he said. "That would make it exactly six and a half hours ago."

"What!" I exclaimed, in the general reaction. "This evening?"

"Yes." He smiled blandly.

Hall Radley stood up and glowered at Thorpe. "It seems we've had our legs pulled, gentlemen."

"I don't think so," said Samuel Enterprise quietly. "Mr. Thorpe, you said something about the need for omniscience as well as skill in committing murder. May I ask what particular knowledge you lacked that makes you fear an unhappy outcome of your perfect crime?"

"The knowledge of Lady Harreston's love for Haylton. A love so intense that while my wife's love for him merely drove her to hysteria, Lady Harreston's drove *her* to suicide.

"I asked Lady Harreston if she would stay the night to keep my wife company, to which she readily agreed. We'd dressed for the theatre, so after the maid had got the guest room ready for me, I went up there, took off my dinner jacket, and put on a smoking jacket. I then went to my wife's room, leaving the dinner jacket over the back of a chair in the guest room, with the door open.

"I mentioned earlier that Lady Harreston's self-control had seemed perfect. But by then it must have been at breaking point. She left the bedroom as I entered. I suppose she'd already decided on suicide, and went out to find the means to commit it. Perhaps her late husband kept a revolver in his desk drawer. She was going

to my study, possibly to search for a gun.

"I do not know if it was some lunatic-inspiration of the suicide that prompted her to search my dinner jacket as she passed the guest room, or simply that she had heard the keys jangling in my pocket earlier in the evening. Whatever it was, she found the murder gun and shot herself with it.

"I had no time to fake any of the evidence before my wife and the maid were on the scene. To complete my despair, Lady Harreston had addressed a note to my wife, telling of her love for Haylton, and apologizing for breaking into my study and using *my* gun.

"I took my wife, who was in a frenzy of hysteria, to her mother's. The police took away the body of Lady Harreston. No doubt they've already extracted the bullet from it, and somewhere an expert in ballistics is poring over a microscope examining its markings. It won't be long before he realizes they're the same as on the bullet that killed Haylton."

He gave a long sigh. "Then I shall be asked to explain the peculiar circumstances of the revolver that killed Haylton from the street being found by Lady Harreston locked in my drawer."

We were silent as Thorpe signalled a steward for another whiskey. He drank it slowly while we sat in stunned silence. Then a steward approached from the lobby and handed him a card. Thorpe laid it on the table. "You see?" he said. The card read: *Detective-Inspector Callister. New Scotland Yard.*

For once Hall Radley tried to have a sympathetic note in his voice. He said, "What a pity you chose Lady Harreston as your witness."

John Thorpe's voice trembled slightly as he said, "She was the most respectable, reliable witness I knew."

He rose heavily from the chair and waddled slowly out into the lobby.

With ever an eye for a lovely dish, gastronomically and otherwise, Simon Templar—better known as The Saint in certain circles—takes a holiday jaunt to Puerto Rico where he meets the world's meanest man and finds a lovely dish loaded with wampum. Which of them does he 'take' first? You'll find the answer in THE UNKIND PHILANTHROPIST, *Leslie Charteris' witty account of the fastest double-take on record, in the next issue of our magazine.*

no stars in my crown

by . . . William R. Cox

Gambling is a crime only when the law makes it so. But crooked play is a crime against man—or woman.

THE DUKE could remember the tune his mother sang, but not the words of the hymn, *Will there be any stars in my crown?* As he walked across Broadway, a hansom cab went by, the horse clop-clopping on the wet pavement. The rain had let up but it was a dank night. The lights of Delmonico's gleamed from behind frosted windows as he passed New York's most sumptuous restaurant. He was not dining at Delmonico's these days.

He walked along Forty-fourth Street until he reached the brownstone house with the engraved brass plate which read *Manhattan Club*. A patrolman in his high helmet pointedly looked the other way as the Duke went up the steps and an obsequious doorman admitted him.

He still had a stake. It was not enough but it would get him entry into a game. He paused after entering the big room, heavy with the luxury of red velvet, gilt and polished mahogany. If the girl were here, if Cal Webber could be inveigled, if Duffy could be fooled . . . The Duke was fairly certain on all these points, but he knew

This is a new story about times long gone—an era when New York's Flat-iron Building rated as one of the world's wonders and the best dinner in town could be had at Delmonico's and such lush plush gambling houses as Canfield's or Duffy's were exclusive clubs. And this is the story of The Duke who got what he didn't deserve and a girl who gave him his star.

that nothing was secure, nothing was sure, not in this world nor probably in the next, where there would be no stars in his crown.

He looked for the girl first. She was not a girl, either, he corrected himself—she was at least thirty. But she was lovely and a perfect foil for him. He had spoken with her and exchanged the time-honored sign of the professional gambler. He had known many of them—cool beautiful women who lived by their wits. This one seemed different from the others. But they all seemed different at first, bless them.

Yes, Doreen was certainly an intriguing woman. If he were younger, less cynical . . .

But he was neither young nor romantic. He was forty, a debonair looking man, slightly grey at the temples. He was a short-carder, a known professional gambler—too well known in too many places. He was nearly to the end of his rope in New York. He wanted only to return to his beloved Southern California now, to buy an orange grove he knew about, to pile everything he had left into this one last venture and learn if life held anything more for him.

Now he looked for Webber. Webber had the cash always on him. Webber, who flashed it unwisely, in the western fashion. Cattle money from Texas. The Duke knew Texas and Texans like he knew the rest of the country and the people—by the experience of living in their midst, gambling with them.

The girl, dark, queenly, smiling, was at the faro layout. He nodded to her, made a gesture with thumb and forefinger and she responded discreetly. So that part of it was going to be all right. It meant a split, but he was sure that her part was going to be necessary.

Duffy was coming toward him now, a beefy, red-faced Irishman who was a political behind-the-scenes man in the organization known as Tammany Hall, a big-timer and a ruffian with a thin veneer of polished manners.

They went into the small office reserved for painful interviews and Duffy said, "Been watchin' you, Davenport. You deal a nice deck. You been kinda lucky here at poker."

The Duke said, "Not so lucky."

"That's right. Our spotters are on to you," said Duffy. He wore two diamonds on his ugly hands and a headlight stone in his stiff shirt bosom.

The Duke said, "You are suggesting . . . ?"

"We run this house clean," said Duffy. "I ain't worried about you—western short-carders don't get far here. Actually, we ain't seen you do anything yet. But—"

The Duke said, "My dear sir, if I did not have an engagement here tonight I would leave now. As it is, I assure you that, after

tonight, you will get along without *my* patronage."

Duffy nodded. "Good. Don't want trouble, y'know. I got the house reputation to consider, y'unnerstand?"

He arose and followed the Duke out of the office. There was no sign on the Duke's face of the disturbance he felt over this little incident. He could have told Duffy his wheels were rigged, his dealers nimble-fingered when the going got tough. He could have told Duffy that his own men were gulling him. But he dared not.

It was not that he was clumsy. He was as good as any man at running up a deck, at dealing seconds and bottoms. But in the gambling business it was impossible not to be recognized as a mechanic sooner or later. Other mechanics always knew.

So this was it—his last night. He sought Cal Webber at the bar, where free champagne flowed and caviar was heaped in a cut-glass bowl for those who rested between whirls at the games.

Webber was a florid and ebullient man who spoke loudly and constantly about El Paso and the great poker played by the nabobs of the cattle industry. His round face was sunburned and frank, his voice loud and assured and he was as friendly as all Texas.

The Duke said, "Split a bottle, sir?"

"Well, say! That's right friendly." Webber beamed at him. "Sure will, pardner. Things slow tonight, huh, pardner?"

"They seem lively enough here." The Duke smiled.

"Yeah, but there ain't no good poker. Penny ante games, that's all. Why man, in eighty-nine I was in Santa Fe. Poker? Why man, I seen John Dougherty make a bet that would put these fellows here in a faint."

"Indeed?" The Duke smiled encouragingly, willing to listen again to the apocryphal tale, knowing the Texan propensity for drawing the long bow to gain a point.

"Yessir. John was playin' Ike Jackson for the champeenship of western poker. They come to a big pot and Ike wrote out a deed to his ranch and ten thousand head o' cattle. Dougherty wrote on a hunk o' paper, handed it to Governor Prince of New Mexico and the Governor signed it. John threw it in the pot and said, 'Raise you the Territory of New Mexico and there's the deed!' "

The Duke laughed appreciatively.

Webber went on triumphantly. "Ike hadda throw in. But he swore pretty hard and told John, 'You can have the pot, but it's a durn good thing the Governor of Texas ain't here!' He was a Texan, yuh see, Ike was . . ."

"I see," said the Duke gravely. The woman had entered the salon and was sitting at a table awaiting service. The door to the bar

opened directly across from where she sat. The Duke said, "Ah, there's Doreen. Do you know her? The best lady poker player in the East."

Webber glanced into the salon, his eyes widening. He said, "Man, I been wantin' to meet her. She's a lady all right, ain't she? Man, she's a queen. You know her?"

The Duke smiled. The trap was sprung by the victim without effort upon the part of the hunters. He said, "Maybe we could induce her to play your favorite game—for the championship of the Manhattan Club."

"I seen a lady faro dealer once," said Webber doubtfully. "Had a mustache, weighed about two hundred . . . You mean that purty gal can play poker?"

"Try her," suggested the Duke. He left his wine unfinished and the Texan followed in his wake, toward the radiance of Doreen's smile. He made the introduction and spoke of Webber's predilection for poker and the girl played the part to the hilt.

"My brother taught me poker," she said. Her voice was husky and pleasant. "He was a rarity among men—an honest gambler. He knew the averages. I learned them from him. After all, Mr. Webber, poker is not a game of skill but a game of judgment. Don't you think a woman's judgment might match that of a man?"

Webber said, "Why, ma'am, you could be right. Supposin' I arrange for a room and we match judgments?" He was delighted and completely taken by the girl, the Duke could see.

Webber left them to arrange for a poker room.

When they were alone the Duke said swiftly, "Have you ever played cards here?"

"No," she said.

"Play them wide open," he instructed her. "I'll meet you at fourty-fourth and Sixth Avenue for the split. Leave immediately the game is ended."

"Of course." She smiled. She wore a grey gown with one simple ornament, a gold nugget clasp at one shoulder. She said, "I'm thrilled to team up with the famous Duke Davenport."

He shook his head. "I don't believe that. And you might well have said 'infamous'."

"You live by your wits. Don't we all? Further downtown there are men of great and respectable names who also live by their wits —and ruin thousands where you ruin dozens . . ."

"Ruin?" The Duke's eyebrows went up. "My dear Doreen, you flatter me. Few men are ruined over a poker table and none by me. I trim the gulls, true. But poor men do not haunt these glittering palaces of sin."

She laughed, said, "You have the true thieves' philosophy: Rob the rich and give to the poor. With that we console ourselves."

"For knowing there will not be

any stars in our crowns?" He said it involuntarily and was surprised at his own words. Yet the woman had prodded him and the spear had gone deep. It was time for him to quit this business . . .

"You know that old hymn?" Her eyes softened and she hummed the tune. She said, "So you're Robin Hood with a deck of cards?"

He said, "No. A tired man nearing middle-age who wants only an orange grove near San José, a few years of solitude which he will learn, of course, to hate, but which will rescue him from this everlasting grind."

She said, "Oranges? Duke Davenport! Are you mad?"

He said, "No, far from it. If I were younger and not what I am I could say many more things to you, Doreen, many things. Through the years I have learned much—and lost much more."

Webber returned then. There was a poker room available and he had expansively arranged for it. They went up a flight of carpeted stairs, turned off a dim-lit hall into a small but comfortable chamber. The room was well-lighted and a man came with cards and chips as they sat down at the green-clothed table.

There was a stool for the houseman who would cut the kitty. The Duke looked at the man and knew at once he was no ordinary attendant. He knew that Duffy had put a mechanic to watch him lest Webber or the girl be cheated.

It all fitted. It was a delicate job to be done and the Duke set himself to the not inconsiderable task.

Webber was a typical western player, a bluffer, but alert to the percentages and angles. In an honest game he would be a formidable opponent. For a moment the Duke wished with all his heart he could afford to meet the Texan in an honest game . . .

There had been a day when he would have done so, for his pleasure. In the beginning, strong in faith, sure of hand and eye, he had believed that gambling could be an honest profession, that percentages paid off, that he could make his fortune honestly. He had been—he was now—a good poker player.

In the beginning it had meant adventure, travel, excitement. He had covered the globe, his skill at cards his only asset. But he had never quite accumulated the stake to buy that big house, to ensconce himself safely behind the percentage he respected. And he had learned about cheaters.

In the beginning it had been self-protection to learn—and use—the cheaters' tricks. He had trimmed some of the biggest of them, he reflected, watching the girl shuffle and deal . . .

Doreen was not too adept but she handled the cards adequately. She could not manipulate the cards, at least she didn't hold them

correctly now for such a maneuver. She was correct, poised, calm, humorous. Webber had said she was a queen and Webber was right—she was a fit partner for a king. But Duke Davenport was no king. Not any more.

Men like Duffy were the kings now. Corrupt to the core, they sat like fat cats while the adventurers came and butted heads against the stone wall of their banks, their crooked wheels, their rake-offs on games like this one. They bought and sold politicians, policemen. They never touched the dice, cards nor bucked a wheel themselves.

Duke had known for years that he was on the wrong side of the gambling fence. But now he was too weary to make the change. He wanted only to retire to Southern California and the citrus business that would care for his old age. People were being told that orange juice was good for their health. Orange juice might one day be Big Business . . .

He jerked his attention back to the game. He won a hand, then lost one. The man on the stool, clicking chips into the voracious kitty, had eyes like gimlets. There was a hand of stud where the Duke had an ace in the hole, on his own deal, and Webber held kings showing. The girl had tens showing and Duke was very well aware of the position in the deck of the remaining aces.

He dealt slowly. The man on the stool leaned forward although the pot was not large, Webber having taunted them into playing against his kings with a fifty-dollar bet.

Webber drew a nine-spot. The Duke's hands were smooth and slick. He slowly turned over the last card for the girl. It was an ace. He drew a deuce for himself.

Webber said, "Down Texas we say 'beat 'em.' I check it."

Two pairs or a third king, Duke said to himself. He had not risked running up the entire deck so that much was left to chance. He needed only to know the key cards.

The girl said, "I raise two hundred, sir."

Duke chuckled. "We have a saying in the East: 'Know when to fold.' I quit." He leaned back. Webber was grinning at the girl.

The houseman did not stir. Duke waited while Webber debated. The westerner was no fool. Finally, he shoved forward a stack and said, "Lady, you got 'em, mebbe, but I want a look."

She said, "I have aces and tens."

Webber said, "Uh-huh. Beats me."

Two pairs then, Duke said to himself, *kings up.* He would have to locate a few more cards. That one had been close. But Doreen had played it beautifully. He was proud of her.

Webber won his own deal, the

girl handed Duke a pair showing in three cards and he collected a small ante. He gathered the cards and riffled them, not too expertly, for the houseman was breathing down his neck. Still, he thought he knew enough about them when he had finished.

It had taken him years of practice to learn that shuffle. He had been a gambler for twenty years, and ten of them had been honest. He had never tried a trick until he was master of it. No layman could possibly catch him in a trick. But another gambler could. He had to work fast now or the houseman would sense the play.

He said, "How about a hand of draw, anything opens?"

He threw them around with seeming carelessness. Webber said, "Ole western poker, this here is. I open for a hundred."

The girl examined her cards. Her dark eyes were cool. She said, "Play."

Duke said, "I'll raise." He had a pair of tens, good enough in three-handed for a raise in case the houseman could see his cards. He put in two hundred.

Webber said, "I raise."

The girl hesitated just long enough. Then she added two hundred dollars' worth of chips to the pot. The Duke said, "Not enough, my friends. Make it five."

Webber whistled tunelessly and only then was the Duke aware that under his breath he was humming too. *Will there be any stars in my crown?* He stopped himself, feeling a little disconcerted.

Webber said, "I'll jest call. This here is gettin' good."

He wanted three cards. The girl took one. The houseman tensed on his stool as he watched Duke deal himself the top three.

Webber said, "Miss Doreen, you done proved yourself pretty tough people. I'm gonna bet you a thousand dollars."

The houseman droned, "Table stakes, ladies and gentlemen."

"We are well aware of the rules of the game," Duke said sharply. "Your duty is to cut the pot, not instruct us."

The man didn't reply. The girl counted her stacks. She said, "Nine hundred and fifty."

"Shucks," grinned Webber. "I seldom miss fifty dollars!"

Duke said, "I pass." He concealed the third ten he had drawn without design off the top, without chicanery. He could have played it, he could have won this pot. His hands trembled a little.

Webber showed his kings and nines, confident as a Texas steer. The girl said, "Sorry, sir. Three sixes."

Duke mixed his hand in with the discards, an involuntary sigh escaping him. If he had dared to win . . . But the girl had to do it. Now, if he could keep Webber interested . . .

His own stake was dwindling. The houseman was sitting back,

assured that Duke was either unable or too frightened to control the game. Webber kept shaking his head.

The girl was calm, but a little color came to her cheeks as she continued to win. The houseman cashed chips for her and she stuffed thick greenbacks into the large reticule she had slung over the back of her chair. The Duke was getting low on the table and low in pocket.

Webber's good-nature was unassailable. Duke had lost two thousand dollars by eleven-thirty. Webber had lost ten thousand. A couple more pots, Duke thought, nice and easy. He had about a thousand left, and that was all the money he had in the world.

If he could get Webber to bet the last of the roll he had on him, lose his own stake, let the girl clean them out, it would be a perfect dodge. And his split would give him enough to buy the little ranch in California.

He said, "The hour grows late for the lady, Webber. And I grow low in pocket. I make it a rule never to lose more than I carry on me. Shall we play one more round?"

"If it's agreeable to Miss Doreen," said the Texan. His admiration for her was undiminished. Money seemed to mean nothing to him. He signed for the chips with a flourish. His losses seemed not to concern him at all.

"Mr. Davenport is right," she said. "Even now the hour is not respectable and my hotel is particular about its female guests." She did not glance at the Duke but she smiled at Webber.

Webber dealt the cards. The big westerner's face was intent now. He would try to recoup in three hands, the typical plunger's common error. It would be stud . . .

The girl bet, showing an ace against her hole card. Duke stayed with a nine-ten. Webber raised with a jack. The girl smiled faintly and re-raised. Duke put in his chips with reluctance.

Webber played and ran them. The girl drew a queen. Duke got a trey. Webber paired his jacks and Duke sweated it out. The westerner said, "Reckon this here's my chance to run yuh or take a small win from what's already in . . . A thousand dollars."

The girl said, "Reckon you're right, pardner," imitating his drawl, and the Texan chuckled. They were healthy and handsome people, and the Texan was fully smitten, Duke could see. He felt old and weary, suddenly, as he closed up his hand.

The Texan drew a deuce and the girl a king. She said, "Now I'll try *you,* Mr. Webber. A thousand?"

He drawled, "Naw, Miss Doreen. You done made a Christian outa me. I know you got kings or queens, mostly queens, and I ain't bettered. How

come you to read my bluff so good?"

"Feminine intuition," she suggested and again they laughed. Webber was no fool, Duke thought. A rich man, a bachelor who loved poker, but definitely no gull. It would never have done to attempt to clip him without the girl.

She dealt an inconsequential hand and Duke took the cards. He was relaxed now, with the goal in sight. He dealt stud and followed a desultory pair of cards, putting into the pot all but a hundred dollars of his money. Then Webber paired his jacks and the girl, Duke knew, had nines backed up and nothing else. He had the position of the nine clear in his mind . . .

Webber said, "Miss Doreen, let's jest run 'em. I bet my stack." There was a thousand in it and ten dollars over. Doreen matched it. Webber said, "You're a dead game sport, Miss Doreen. I know you're givin' me a chance."

Duke said, "Look out for her, Webber. She draws them like a veteran!" He made a discreet sign and Doreen upset a stack of chips with a clatter.

The houseman's eyes shifted for a split instant and Duke had the nine in his palm. He gave Webber nothing, tossed the nine face up in front of the girl. It was done.

He watched Webber grin admiringly at the girl's three nines. Duke cashed in his lone hundred. They arose and murmuring politely, as though leaving a social tea, they moved downstairs. Duffy stood in an alcove, watching them. The Duke donned his cloak and popped open his opera hat, cocking it on his head.

Doreen left at once. Webber said, "The sweetest little gal I've seen in many a moon. Reckon I might see her again if it would be all right with you, Davenport."

The Duke said wearily, "Quite all right."

"She took our money like a lil' Coomanche." Webber laughed.

Duffy was watching as Duke sipped his wine. Webber said, "Well, reckon I'll hit that hay. Been nice to meetcha, partner." His handclasp was strong. Duke watched him go out into the night. It was raining again. Duffy had not moved. The houseman came down and whispered to Duffy and the beefy man nodded. Duke deliberately waited but Duffy disappeared.

Duke turned and walked out of the club. Despite the rain he headed afoot across Fifth Avenue, walked the long block to Sixth. He stood beneath an awning, listening to the drip of rain upon the pavement. A corner light flickered, the gas dying, then blazing high. Like a man's life, he thought, never constant, always fluctuating. A banal example of philosophy. He would have to read more, think deeper, in Cali-

fornia. A man should know more about the hidden springs that control his life . . .

The hansom cab came. The horse was ancient and slow. Duke moved to where the light would fall upon him. The cab slowed, came to a stop and he could see the pale oval of her face, the dark depths that were her dark eyes.

He said, "It was well done, Doreen. Have you counted it?"

"Oh, yes," she said.

He paused, delicately waiting for her to hand him his share. Her hand lay in her lap. She said, "Duke Davenport. You are quite the Easterner now, aren't you? You've lost all touch with the old West."

He said, "I beg your pardon?"

She said, "Clever man. Nimble-fingered. I never say you do it, not once tonight."

He said, "No compliments, please. I will never do it again, God willing."

Her voice was suddenly emotional. "You've done it once too often, Duke Davenport. No, don't move. This is a gun in my lap. A Colt, Duke. I'm a Texan too. My name was Sutherland."

He stood quite still, looking at her. He looked at the revolver, at the girl. He said, "Sutherland?" The name tugged at his memory.

"Twenty years ago, in Leadville," she said harshly. "Mike Sutherland. He was about the age you are now. You ruined him, Duke Davenport. I was ten years old then. It was hard to see him go downhill after you cleaned him."

He said slowly, "Mike Sutherland was a very poor poker player." It all came back. One of his first successes in the mining town. Sutherland, a feverish man who over-bet two pairs. Mike Sutherland. Doreen's father.

She said, "It took me years to catch up with you, to find Webber to help me. The man had to have money, he had to be clever. Wasn't Webber clever, Duke Davenport? He was a Ranger once, you know. Ben Thompson taught him. He played with Luke Short, Bat Masterson . . . He's visiting Masterson here now, so I wouldn't advise you to seek him out."

Duke said, "So you came here to tell me that you had avenged your father by cleaning me. Not for the money, but for revenge?"

She said, "I came to teach you there is justice in the world."

He looked at the gun. "At gun's point," he murmured. "As usual. Well, it has been charming, Doreen. I wish you—and Webber—good luck and happiness."

She cried, "You dare not think that of me. There is nothing . . . Webber is merely my good friend!"

He bowed. "Of course. You are a lady gambler, above reproach. Furthermore, you are very lovely." He restored the opera hat, flicking it with his forefinger so that it perched a little

askew upon his head. He was smiling. The lamplight flared and picked them out, face to face, he smiling, she frowning.

"May you have many stars in your crown," he said.

He turned and without haste moved down Sixth Avenue toward his hotel. She had been even more lovely in her self-righteous indignation. She had fire, humor, courage, brains. She was indeed a queen.

He passed Forty-second Street and there were fewer lights. One hundred dollars—well, he could leave New York on it, at least. It would be hard to start over in the little wolf dens but he could do it. He was not yet defeated—not completely defeated.

He thought of Mike Sutherland, the alcoholic who had contributed to the early prosperity and education of Duke Davenport. He had not even known Sutherland had a daughter. The man had simply been a poor gambler. In those days it had seemed to Duke that gambling could be honest if only because there were such men as Sutherland. The Duke of those days didn't use tricks because he didn't know how. He'd played honest poker then.

Still, that was the fine irony of life. For his sins he was now repaid. He hummed aloud: *Will there be any stars in my crown?*

The hansom cab must have come around the corner. He was so wrapped in his musings that he nearly walked into it.

The girl leaned out, said, "That song haunts me, Duke Davenport. I must talk with you. I must tell you . . . I cannot take your money."

He said gravely, "If you believe in your justice . . ."

She said, "Yes. You have me there. That's it—who am I to dispense justice? And to a man who hums a hymn and talks of California and a new life. Will you talk to me, Duke Davenport? It could be that we both are lost . . ."

He got into the cab. He said, "Central Park, driver." He said, "Yes, there *will* be a star in my crown . . ."

The rain pattered hard on the roof of the cab and the clatter of the horses' hooves on the street drowned out his voice.

the strangled witness

by . . . Leslie Ford

A murder filled with incredible clues. Could a man possibly be in two places, miles apart, at the exact moment of his death?

A FRECKLE-FACED boy in a powder-blue uniform stood in front of the D'Orsay on Massachusetts Avenue, holding open the door of a twelve-cylinder maroon and black convertible. He did a swift skip-and-shuffle to keep his feet warm as he waited.

Mrs. Ash came out of the D'Orsay's revolving doors, sleek and blond and lovely. "You shouldn't stand out here, Tad. You'll get pneumonia." She smiled at him as she slid her slim body under the wheel and folded her mink coat around her knees.

Tad glanced quickly over his shoulder, then leaned forward. "Say, Mrs. Ash. There was a fellow here last night, and I heard him ask Cogswell to try to find out where you went when you go out."

The amused smile, the mask that Lynn Ash wore to meet the world she lived in, deepened in her gray-green eyes and lifted the corners of her brilliantly rouged mouth. "Annapolis is a good place, Tad," she said. "Can you remember it?"

Tad flushed. Mrs. Ash laughed,

For two decades Colonel Primrose, the best-known crime consultant in the nation's capitol, has dominated Leslie Ford's most fascinating detective-mystery stories, making his newest appearance in the recently published Scribner book, WASHINGTON WHISPERS MURDER. *Here he is again, lending his unusual deductive abilities to the solution of a strange murder that grew out of a mixture of politicians, power-mad men and pulchritudinous ladies.*

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opened her bag. "Thanks for telling me, Tad," she said.

The boy looked at the folded bill in his cold, red hand. "Gee, Mrs. Ash," he mumbled, "I didn't mean that!"

"I know you didn't, Tad. But I did. Okay?"

"Okay, Mrs. Ash!" He touched his cap and shut the door.

Lynn Ash closed her hand on the brake and let in the clutch. "I'm very glad you told me, Tad," she said softly to herself as she slipped the car into gear . . .

An hour later Mrs. Ash entered a private dining room in a small restaurant on Saratoga Street in Baltimore. A large man with gray hair, steely blue eyes, and an iron jaw came to meet her.

"I thought it would be simpler to meet you here than in Washington," he said, when the waiter had gone. "Fage and his crowd are on my heels the minute I set foot there."

Mrs. Ash smiled. She took off her coat and sat down at the table. "Washington is a strange place just now, Mr. Quinn," she said.

He pushed the bowl of roses to one side, looked at her across the table. "Well," he said, "let's have it. What's the trouble?"

"We're losing," Mrs. Ash said calmly. "We've got to change our line of attack."

Mr. Quinn frowned.

"I told you Washington is a changed place, Mr. Quinn. None of the old tricks work any more. That goes for the power lobbies, too. Marius Fage and his People's Lobby, working for the Administration Power Bill, are winning. And we're losing. They are the new set-up. We are the old."

Mr. Quinn's jaw tightened. "What about Senator Greer?"

Mrs. Ash shrugged her sleek brown satin shoulders lightly. "You've got to hold Senator Greer," she said. "And his political skirts aren't any too clean. If it's going to help him in the home state, he's going to switch from private power to the Administration and he'll take those five votes he controls with him. From the looks of things, it won't be long now."

"Go on," Mr. Quinn said shortly.

"Everybody knows Senator Greer got Mr. Cameron's seat in the Senate by buying it. Mr. Cameron sits in the House of Representatives waiting to get his knife into Greer in the fall elections. If Greer goes home as the champion of the people's rights, the slayer of the octopus power corporation he may get a lot of free votes and get back in again. People's rights are a lot more popular than power corporations right now."

"Which our friend Fage points out every day," said Mr. Quinn curtly.

"That's his job. Just as mine, as lobbyist for you and your Star

Utilities Corporation, is to keep Greer favoring private ownership."

Mrs. Ash blew a delicate plume of smoke from her red lips. "As a matter of fact," she went on, "Marius Fage and his People's Lobby aren't half so dangerous to the Star Utilities Corporation and you—and me—as our young friend, Andy Blair."

Mr. Quinn flicked the long, gray ash from his cigar impatiently. "That young fool of a reporter?"

"Andy isn't a fool, Mr. Quinn. He's a rising and energetic journalist. The whole set-up in Washington is perfect for him, these days. His daily attack on Senator Greer, and on utilities corporations, and on you, is syndicated all over the country."

Mr. Quinn gripped his cigar savagely.

"What's more," Mrs. Ash went on quietly, "I don't know what Mr. J. Howard Quinn thinks about his articles, but I know Senator Greer is getting pretty sensitive. Tracy Scatcherd—you remember him, Greer's secretary —entertained a whole night club full of Washington debutantes and legation secretaries last evening with one of his celebrated imitations of Senator Greer having apoplexy when Andy Blair's name is mentioned. You may think Andy's a young fool, but Senator Greer knows better."

Mr. Quinn looked steadily at her "So you think Greer is going to switch, after all?" he said. "Turn against the power lobbies?"

Lynn Ash nodded. "Unless we do something," she said.

"What can we do?"

"That's why I wanted to see you. I happen to know that Andy Blair has three or four good reasons not to like Senator Greer. The chief one is Nina Cameron. When Andy's paper, in the home state, sold out to Mr. Greer, Andy quit his job. He said it was because of political principle. Actually it was because he was—and is—in love with Senator Cameron's daughter, Nina."

Mr. Quinn looked puzzled. "What's this got to do with us?"

"Everything," said Mrs. Ash coolly. "It also happens that Senator Greer met Nina Cameron when she came home from Europe last fall and, though he's known her since she was a child, he fell madly in love with her. At his age he should know better. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seem them together night before last at Kitty Vale's place on G Street. That's why I wired you. We've got to change our tactics."

Mr. Quinn frowned. "I don't like it," he said slowly. "And I don't quite understand it. Is Nina Cameron in love with him?"

Mrs. Ash shrugged. "She's thrilled to death. Who wouldn't be? One of the wealthiest and the best-looking man in the United

States in love with you? She's swept off her feet."

Mr. Quinn shook his head, said, "I still don't understand."

"I'll explain," said Lynn Ash. "The Star Utilities Corporation—President Mr. J. Howard Quinn—wants its own particular river with its hundred million horsepower dam to stay under its own and highly profitable control—and for the United States Government to keep hands off. Right?"

Quinn nodded.

"Well, to do it you've got to keep Senator Greer and his five votes from siding with the Administration. Your old lobby methods didn't work so you hired me—most confidentially—to see what I could do.

"If Senator Greer had fallen in love with *me,* everything would have been lovely. But he didn't. He's in love with his chief opponent's daughter. His chief opponent is also *your* chief opponent, has fought you and your corporation for thirty years. There's your weapon, and it's the only one you've got left. And if you aren't interested, you're wasting your money and I'm wasting my time. Is that clear?"

Mr. Quinn pushed back his chair and paced along the floor of the small room. Mrs. Ash watched him a moment.

"It doesn't make any difference to me personally," she said. "I rather like Nina Cameron, I'm quite fond of Andy Blair and I don't care much for Mr. Greer. But that's neither here nor there. I'm thinking about my job. Isn't that what a lobbyist is paid to do?"

Mr. Quinn came back to the table and sat down. "Yes," he said shortly. "You win. I don't like it, and I don't want to hear the details. Go ahead. Do it your way."

II

Mrs. Ash slipped into a seat in the Visitors' Gallery of the United States Senate. She looked across to the Members' Gallery and saw a dark, slim girl there, looking down eagerly at the Senate floor, her lips parted breathlessly. Mrs. Ash, glancing down, saw a tall, handsome, immaculately groomed man crossing the floor. He was smiling up at the girl. Something in the radiance of Nina Cameron's face made Lynn Ash frown briefly.

A moment later she saw Senator Greer come into the Members' Gallery. He was dark-haired, suave, smiling. She saw Nina look up, breathless and smiling; saw their hands meet for an instant. Mrs. Ash glanced across at the Press Gallery, above the clock behind the President's desk. A young man with a shock of untidy brown hair and a flushed, angry face was sitting in the top row of the half-empty gallery.

Andy Blair was watching Senator Greer and Nina Cameron.

Then Mrs. Ash looked down, swept the floor with a brief glance. When she looked up again Senator Greer was gone, and in a moment she saw him strolling with easy elegance across the floor to his seat, to listen to Senator Boyd, who had the floor.

Mrs. Ash left her seat then, as did others in the gallery. For they knew what the long-winded southern senator would ramble on about today.

The corridor was empty as Mrs. Ash hurried past the elevator marked "Senators Only." Nina Cameron was just getting into the public elevator.

"Oh, hello, Nina!" said Mrs. Ash. "Come along with me and have some tea."

Nina hesitated. "Thanks. I'd be delighted," she said finally.

A few minutes later they sat in Mrs. Ash's apartment on a luxurious sofa in front of the fire, a pot of hot tea before them. Lynn Ash watched Nina Cameron struggling to conceal her feelings.

"Doesn't Greer get money from the power companies?" Lynn Ash asked.

"Why shouldn't he?" said Nina, defiantly.

"Darling, I agree." Lynn laughed. "It's just too bad that it gives Andy Blair such a club to whack him, editorially."

Nina Cameron flushed again. "Oh, Andy's so—so stupid," she said impatiently.

"I think perhaps he's too influenced by people like Mr. Fage, and—oh—" Mrs. Ash paused.

"You mean my father?" said Nina, bluntly.

"Heavens, no!" said Mrs. Ash. "Your father's painfully honest, and nobody ever doubted it, dear. Oh, there's the door bell . . Maybe it's Senator Greer."

She saw the color deepen in Nina's face and she smiled faintly. They listened as the maid opened the door. But it was Tracy Scatcherd's voice in the hall; and a second later he was bounding in with his hand out, his face glowing red from the cold January wind.

He said, "Terribly sorry, Lynn. Senator couldn't come. They've ordered the investigation, wired for all the votes cast in the election to be sent here to Washington for a re-count. Senator's behind it to the last ditch." After a brief bow to Nina Cameron he proceeded to ignore her, talked directly to Lynn Ash.

He took whiskey and soda she mixed for him, said, "Thank you, Lynn. By the way, I saw Fage downstairs. Has he been here?"

"Marius? No. He doesn't come here. I've done my best, but he always has something else to do."

"He's giving us trouble. He's trying to get us to swing over to the Administration's new power bill."

"Well," Lynn Ash inquired, "aren't you swinging?"

"No, indeed we aren't! You

should have stayed and heard Senator." He put down his empty glass, tilted his rimless pince-nez to the angle at which Senator Greer wore his large horn-rimmed ones, drew himself up stiffly.

"My dear fellow," he said, emulating the Senator's deep, suave voice. "When I am convinced that government control and operation of the vast power facilities of my state is what the people of my state want, then, sir, and not until then, I shall give it my heartiest support."

Nina stood up. "I've got to be going along, Lynn," she said. "Thanks a lot." She bowed briefly to Tracy Scatcherd.

Mrs. Ash walked with her to the door. When she came back Tracy was pouring himself a drink of straight rye. Lynn Ash watched him, coolly calculating. Scatcherd drank too much, she thought.

He came across the room and sat down in the place Nina had left. "She's dangerous, Lynn," he whispered. "I heard Senator talking to her last night. She's trying to make him marry her."

"Why don't you warn Mr. Greer about it?" said Mrs. Ash coolly.

Tracy flushed, took a swallow from the glass.

"Oh," said Mrs. Ash. "You have already. What did he say?"

Tracy's thin lips trembled. "I thought he was going to strike me," he said.

Mrs. Ash regarded him thoughtfully. "I suppose you know," she said slowly, "that if Nina marries Greer you are out of a job?"

Scatcherd writhed nervously. "I know," he said angrily. "She doesn't like me. I'm afraid of her, Lynn. And I'm flat broke. With my aunt ill and all . . ." He looked suddenly as if he were going to cry.

Mrs. Ash smiled sympathetically. She reached for her bag on the end table, opened it. "It's too bad about your aunt, dear. I want to help you . . ."

Scatcherd watched her. "Oh, no, Lynn. I couldn't — — —"

She shoved crisp bills into his hand, said, "Yes, dear. It's for your aunt. You must let me help—"

He pocketed four fifty-dollar bills.

After a moment Mrs. Ash said calmly, "I think it's a mistake for you to let Marius Fage see the Senator so often. If this new project goes through, it'll ruin me financially. I'd have to start collecting on old debts to live, I'm afraid."

She opened her bag again, took out a little black leather notebook. "I've let *you* have four thousand, two-hundred-and-fifty dollars in the last two years. That would keep me going a few months."

Tracy Scatcherd, flushed and dry-lipped, tried to smile, pass it

off as a joke. But he knew it was no joke and she knew he knew. Then he finished his drink and left.

"I wonder," she thought, as she saw him to the door, "just how long it would take him to do something desperate."

III

That evening Lynn Ash dressed carefully for dinner. As she surveyed herself in the long mirrors that made up three walls of her dressing room the phone rang. She frowned as Tracy Scatcherd's nervous voice came over the wire.

"Lynn," he said quickly, "Senator speaks tonight over WCB at ten-thirty. I just wanted to tell you that everything will be all right."

"Be careful, Tracy!" she said sharply.

"I will. Good-by."

Lynn Ash put down the phone and stared thoughtfully at the lovely images of herself reflected in the series of mirrors.

"Mr. Fage is here, ma'am," Lola announced at the door.

"I'm ready, Lola. You may start the drinks."

Two hours later, at nine o'clock, Marius Fage rose to go. It had been a simple but delicious dinner. Lynn Ash was a charming and beautiful hostess.

"I've still got a lot of work to do," Fage said. "Greer isn't through yet. But I think we've got him on the run."

"You've worked awfully hard, haven't you." Lynn Ash's voice was caressing.

Their eyes met for an instant. Lynn Ash lowered her long, silky black lashes. It was part of her act, of course, but she was vaguely uneasy with this lanky man in the ill-fitting dinner jacket and store-tied black tie. He puzzled her.

He said, "Thank you—and for the dinner, too. It's been a great pleasure, Mrs. Ash."

Lynn Ash closed the front door behind him. She looked at her watch, returned to the softly-lighted drawing room and sat down. The minutes dragged by, one by one, until the Louis Quinze clock on the mantel struck the half-hour.

Then Mrs. Ash got up and went into her dressing-room. She put on a small, black velvet hat, brushed a puff lightly across her face, deepened the color on her lips. She took two letters out of a drawer from under a pile of gossamer stockings, put them into her bag, and switched out the light . . .

Sometime later a sudden blast of cold air blew into the dark kitchen of Mrs. Ash's apartment as the door of the service entrance opened, then closed again swiftly. For a few moments a slim, dark figure huddled motionless, dimly outlined against the white porcelain sink.

After a moment the figure

moved across the kitchen, went through the serving pantry, dining room and into the drawing room. Mrs. Ash switched on a light in there, looked swiftly around. Everything was just as she had left it, warm, lovely, secure.

A shudder went through her slight body and she caught her breath sharply as she saw her face reflected in the girandole above the cellaret. Her hand trembled as she raised it to look at the tiny jewelled watch on her wrist.

The Louis Quinze clock struck a soft musical note. Mrs. Ash went across the drawing room, turned on the radio. The fear died out of her eyes as an easy, cultivated voice filled the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Senator Greer, and I want to talk to you a few minutes about the position I find myself in in relation to the power development in my state. I have always supported private endeavor—and I shall continue to support it . . ."

A smile lighted Lynn Ash's pale, lovely face. She went into the foyer and took down the house phone. "This is Mrs. Ash," she said. "If my car hasn't already gone to the garage, will you see if I left a vanity case in it, please? On the seat. Thank you."

It was about two hours later when Tracy Scatcherd fumbled unsteadily for the keyhole in the heavy, polished door of Senator Greer's palatial residence on the edge of Massachusetts Park. It was after midnight, and Tracy was more than a little drunk. Little beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and on the back of his shaking hands. The key made sharp, ineffectual clinks against the brass lock. He gave up and pressed the bell. Almost immediately the door was opened by a short, stocky Japanese.

"Evening, Kitamura."

"Good evening, sir."

"Senator in?"

"In the library, sir."

"Has he asked for me?" Scatcherd said nervously. He patted his moist forehead with a silk handkerchief.

"I am just come in, sir. I do not know."

The Japanese watched him go up the stairs, then went back to his pantry. In a moment he came out with a tray containing a siphon, a decanter and a glass. With noiseless tread he went down the hall. The door of the library was open. He went in.

Senator Greer was sitting in a deep lounge chair in front of the fire. The radio beside him was turned on and a newscaster's voice droned softly.

Kitamura put the tray down on the table. "You care for anything, sir?"

Senator Greer did not answer. Kitamura turned to go. Then he stopped. There was something strange about the limp white hand hanging over the edge of the chair.

Kitamura stepped closer to

Senator Greer, stood looking impassively at the front of the Senator's shirt where a blackened mass of blood discolored the whiteness.

After a moment Kitamura went to the telephone . . .

Fifteen minutes later a policeman was stationed at the door of Senator Greer's home. In another ten minutes a car turned into the drive and stopped behind the police cars parked there. The policeman watched two men get out. One was a hulking, square-shouldered man in a very long overcoat. A smaller man followed the large man into the house.

"Evening, Colonel," said Captain Brady of the Washington Homicide Division. He shook hands with John Primrose, Colonel 92nd Engineers, U.S.A. (Retired).

"Hello Buck." He shook hands also with Phineas Buck, First Sergeant 92nd Engineers, U.S.A. (Retired).

"The doctor's just finishing, and we're about through with fingerprints and photos. Come in."

Sergeant Buck laid Colonel Primrose's hat and overcoat and his own on a high-backed Italian chair standing near the door, then blew violently on his large hands as he followed Captain Brady and Colonel Primrose to the library door.

Colonel Primrose took in the scene before him: Long windows with heavy red velvet hangings. High ceilings, thick rugs, heavy furniture, high book-lined walls. A green leather armchair, a black sleeve, and a limp white hand. The familiar smell of cordite; and another odor, too. Like burned cloth, Colonel Primrose thought.

The police doctor wiped his hands and pulled down his cuffs. "Howdy, Colonel," he said. "The Senator's been dead about two hours, far as I can tell. Bullet's probably in the back of the chair. . . . By the way," he added briskly, "I suppose you fellows noticed his watch is gone?"

He winked at Sergeant Buck, whose face showed as much reciprocal amusement as a carved mahogany statue.

Captain Brady nodded. "This is Lieutenant McGee, Ninth Precinct, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose turned as Lieutenant McGee stepped forward diffidently and cleared his throat. "Mighty glad to meet you, sir," he said. "I'm holding the butler, and I've got a couple of men upstairs trying to sober up the Senator's secretary." He consulted his notebook. "The secretary's name is Scatcherd."

"And the butler?" said Colonel Primrose.

"Won't talk, sir. A Japanese. Says he doesn't know anything, was out all evening."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I'll talk to both of them later," he said.

He peered about the room. Lieutenant McGee looked at him curiously. Colonel Primrose stood there, looking down at the corpse as if he'd never seen one before. Didn't look much like a army officer, Lieutenant McGee thought. Medium height and on the plump side; no ramrod down his back. Moved slowly, as if he'd never do any hurrying for anything. The famous Colonel Primrose looked just like anybody else, the police lieutenant thought.

"Looks as if he wasn't expecting it, don't you think, Colonel?" Captain Brady said.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "You haven't found the gun?"

"No."

"Or the watch?"

"No. May turn up in a pawnshop."

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "I don't think so," he said. "The windows, Sergeant."

Sergeant Buck moved quickly. He went round the room, examining each window carefully. "Unlocked one here, sir. Opens out on a porch, sir."

"We're having a look around outside in a minute, Colonel," said Brady.

Colonel Primrose nodded. He was staring out onto the porch and at the garden beyond it.

"What about the butler, sir?" said Lieutenant McGee.

"I'll talk to him now. And I'd like a go at this room before it's turned out."

"Okay, Colonel. We'll be through in half an hour."

The sergeant opened the door, followed Colonel Primrose out, and closed the door behind him.

"The big guy looks as if he thought somebody was going to try and eat the Colonel," said Lieutenant McGee.

Brady laughed. "They've been buddies for thirty years," he said. "Buck was heavyweight champion of the Army, twenty-five years ago. They say he's got a whole row of houses in San Francisco bought with poker money. I guess the Sergeant's got more money than the Colonel. Nice fellow, too."

IV

Colonel Primrose sat in a heavy Jacobean chair that Sergeant Buck had pulled out from the long dining room table.

"Why did you have to let Mr. Scatcherd in, Mr. Kitamura?" he said. "Hasn't he a key?"

The stocky little Japanese looked impassively at him, replied in his precise, sibilant English. "Yes, sir, but many nights he cannot find hole for key."

Colonel Primrose leaned forward. "Kitamura!" he said quietly. "Who came here tonight?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Where were you all evening?"

"I go to my gymnasium on M Street."

There was a sudden commotion in the hall, and Colonel Primrose

turned to the door. It was Captain Brady who entered, and he had something in his hand. He smiled as he held it up for the colonel to see. It was a thin gold watch resting in a coil of fine mesh chain. The crystal was shattered, and the hands stood at ten-forty-three.

"Here's the Senator's watch. One of the boys found it in the bushes at the end of the garden path. The watch stopped at an hour that agrees with the doc's verdict. He said about two hours. The watch stopped at ten-forty-three. It's now about one a.m.

Colonel Primrose was looking at the watch with a puzzled expression.

Captain Brady said, "What's the matter?"

"It won't wash," said Colonel Primrose. "That's all. But it's very peculiar."

"You mean you don't think this was the time of the murder?"

"Right," said Colonel Primrose. "From ten-thirty to eleven Senator Greer was talking over WCB. I heard him. He had to be killed after that."

Captain Brady was annoyed. "Then why would his watch have stopped at that hour?"

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "I don't know," he said. "But we'll try to find out, Captain."

Colonel Primrose and Sergeant Buck went down to the library when the police left.

"Somebody made a mistake, Sergeant," the Colonel said. "That watch was planted, of course."

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Buck.

The room had not been disturbed by the police. It was a luxurious setting for the quiet hours of a wealthy and cultured man, the paneled walls lined halfway up with books, above them paintings that the Colonel recognized as modern French.

Colonel Primrose knelt down in front of the fireplace. He took a pencil out of his vest pocket and prodded cautiously in the faintly smoking embers. "Remember to tell Brady we want these andirons fingerprinted, Buck."

"Yes, sir."

"And get a piece of paper out of the table drawer and take this."

Colonel Primrose was holding neatly balanced on his pencil what looked like a small bit of charred paper. Buck squinted at it. Seeing that the Colonel was sniffing, he sniffed too. The faint odor of burned cloth was distinct.

"Cloth, sir."

"Yes," said Colonel Primrose. "I smelled it when we first came in. Here's another piece."

He deposited a second blackened fragment on the paper. One edge of it was brown and solid where the double thickness of the threads had resisted the flame.

"The hem," Colonel Primrose said. "It's a man's handkerchief. A cheap one of coarse linen. We'll have it tested for blood-stain."

He sniffed the air again and got to his feet, stood looking about

the room for an instant. Then he went to the chair where Senator Greer lay, a grim, unconscious spectator. He grasped the dead shoulder gently, and raised the body. Sergeant Buck edged him to one side, with a respectful air of disapproval, and took the burden out of his hands. Colonel Primrose looked at the chair and at the torn back of the Senator's broadcloth coat.

"Hold on," he said. "What's this?"

He bent down closer, and from under the dead man's left sleeve, near the shoulder seam, he took a small piece of transparent stuff. He held it in the palm of his hand, staring at it.

"Looks like a piece of pink cellophane," he mused.

"That's right, sir."

"But what's a piece of pink cellophane doing stuck under his arm?"

"Got me, sir."

"Me, too," said Colonel Primrose. "But we'll just hang on to it. Put it in an envelope. Now let's talk to Scatcherd."

When Captain Brady came back some minutes later Colonel Primrose was talking to Tracy Scatcherd. Colonel Primrose regarded the secretary through a pair of wise old eyes that had seen men at their best and worst and had always tried not to judge them on sight. He was trying not to judge Tracy Scatcherd now, as the secretary, shaking like an old man with palsy, reeking of alcohol, shifty-eyed, stood before them, obviously lying.

"When did you see Mr. Greer last?" Colonel Primrose said.

"It was just about eight-thirty. I stepped into the library to tell him I was going out."

"You didn't go with him to the broadcasting station?"

Scatcherd's hands shook violently. "No, no. I didn't go with him."

"Where did you spend the evening, Mr. Scatcherd?"

Tracy Scatcherd made a violent effort to compose himself. He moistened his swollen lips. "In deference to my dead chief, sir," he said, "I cannot tell you where I spent the entire evening."

There was an instant's silence. Finally Captain Brady said, "Why can't you?"

Tracy achieved a momentary dignity. "Because, sir, the political consequences would be too great."

Captain Brady mopped his brow. "Great Scott!" he said. "You think you're the Secretary of State?"

"No, sir. But as Senator's secretary I sometimes had assignments of a—well, discreet nature."

"Perhaps, Mr. Scatcherd," Colonel Primrose said gravely, "you can tell us where you spent *part* of the evening."

"Certainly, sir. I left the house about eight-thirty and went to the Press Club to see a man who's been making scurrilous attacks on

Senator. I took a taxi, and I waited at the Club for about half an hour but Mr. Blair, the man I wanted to see, didn't come. I then went to his rooms in the Blackstone. He wasn't there. I left from there to do my special errand for Senator. Shortly after eleven o'clock I went to Joe's place on 16th Street. I came here at twelve-thirty."

"How shortly after eleven o'clock, Mr. Scatcherd?"

"Ten minutes or so."

Captain Brady took his mangled cigar out of his mouth. "Do you know if Senator Greer had any enemies?"

Scatcherd hesitated, and Colonel Primrose smiled. He thought, "He's hoping we'd ask that."

"I don't believe for a minute, sir, that either of the two men who've been so abominably scurrilous about Senator could possibly do such a thing."

"Who are they, Scatcherd?"

"Why, Mr. Blair and Mr. Fage. Everybody knows about their campaign to discredit Senator with the voters. But you'll be making a great mistake to accuse either of them of Senator's murder." He was relaxed, confident now.

"Don't you worry," said Captain Brady. "I've made lots of mistakes before now. So it's Fage and Blair, is it?"

Colonel Primrose knocked out his pipe in the fireplace. "Mr. Scatcherd," he said amiably, "who visited Senator Greer this evening?"

"I have no idea, sir." Scatcherd's face paled.

"He had no appointment that you know of?"

"None."

"Except at the radio station?" said Captain Brady.

"Except that, at ten-thirty."

"And you have no idea who would be likely to call on him here at night?"

For a moment the secretary hesitated. Then his lips snapped shut in a tight grimace.

"I have no idea, sir."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "It's too bad," he said. "Have you a handkerchief, Mr. Scatcherd?"

Scatcherd stared blankly. Colonel Primrose waited.

"A handkerchief?" he said, at last. "Why, certainly."

"May I see it?"

Scatcherd produced one with shaking fingers from his breast pocket. Colonel Primrose nodded gravely, thanked him.

"I think that's all, then, Mr. Scatcherd." In the doorway he turned. "Mr. Scatcherd," he said, "how did you know Senator Greer was murdered?"

Scatcherd had risen to his feet. He stood motionless, staring.

Captain Brady wheeled back. "Well?" he said curtly.

Scatcherd's voice rose shrilly. "The policeman told me!" he cried.

"Of course," Colonel Primrose

said. "Good night, Mr. Scatcherd."

Sergeant Buck closed the door behind him. Captain Brady stared at Colonel Primrose.

"What's the idea of that?" he demanded.

"I just wanted to find out how he learned it," said Colonel Primrose mildly.

"Well, you did."

"Yes," said Colonel Primrose. "At least I found out that it wasn't the policeman who told him."

V

Next morning Sergeant Buck, lantern-jawed, gray-eyed, and stern-lipped, pulled the car alongside the curb in front of Colonel Primrose's yellow Georgian house on P Street in Georgetown, lifted out a bundle of newspapers, mounted the short flight of stone steps and went inside. In Colonel Primrose's study, he deposited the papers on a low table beside the Colonel's chair.

"There they are, sir. Thirty of 'em."

"Thanks, Buck."

Colonel Primrose was still reading when Captain Brady arrived.

Brady said, "Did you notice that Blair's column didn't appear this morning? I checked with the city editor. No copy turned in. The fellow's disappeared. He dropped in last night at the Press Club, said he'd just finished a sizzling column about Senator Greer. He left the club and hasn't been seen since. And he didn't turn the column in."

Colonel Primrose frowned. "I want to know more about him," he said, "and about this man Marius Fage."

"Fage is an out-and-out lobbyist," Brady said. "Against private power. Rugged sort of fellow, pretty likable too. Well, I'm off to see Scatcherd. If he doesn't come through about that extra hour, I'm going to take him in. Then he'll wish he had."

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "Give him rope, Brady," he said. "He knows something, and I have the feeling that it's something he wants us to find out. What's your opinion on the time Greer was killed?"

Brady shook his head. "Waiting for the autopsy report. Get it at ten-thirty. Oh, one more thing . . . There's been a lot of talk about Greer and the Cameron girl. The point seems to be this: She was once Blair's girl, gave him up for the Senator."

"Ah," said Colonel Primrose. "That's interesting."

After Captain Brady left the Colonel sat staring thoughtfully into the fire. Finally he spoke to Buck. "It's Scatcherd that stumps me, Buck," he said.

"Yes, sir?"

"I can't see him defending a lady, can you?"

"The man is a louse, sir."

Sergeant Buck had an unerring eye. "I can't see him defending anybody but himself."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "But I'm curious about the fellow. Get me a picture of him, Buck. Have it at the Club at ten. I'm going now to call on Nina Cameron."

Colonel Primrose dismissed his taxi in front of the Belmont and made his way through the revolving doors into the lobby.

"Miss Cameron, please," he said to the pasty-faced young man at the desk. "Colonel Primrose."

The clerk plugged in a switch. "Colonel Primrose to see Miss Cameron. . . . *Miss* Cameron. . . . No, *Primrose*. Colonel Primrose. . . . All right."

"Sorry, sir," he said, "Miss Cameron can't see anyone. She's ill."

Colonel Primrose went out and hailed a taxi. If Brady had a man on the job he could afford to put off his visit.

At Logan Circle, Colonel Primrose left the taxi, thrust his chin deep into the upturned collar of his overcoat, and strode off down 16th street. Joe's front room was empty; Colonel Primrose went into the back room. At the sight of him Joe and his companion got to their feet.

"Hello, Joe," said Colonel Primrose with a chuckle. "Buck, are you A.W.O.L.?"

Sergeant Buck drew a photograph out of his pocket. Joe beamed.

"Hello, Colonel," he said. "When Phineas asked me if I know where he could get a picture of Mr. Scatcherd, I just pointed to my rogues' gallery. You know, I was telling Phineas here it's certainly a shame about the Senator."

"Was he one of your customers?" Colonel Primrose asked.

"Not what you'd call a customer. In fact, Colonel, he was in here just once. But, man, that once will stick in my memory."

Joe's stocky figure shook with laughter as he went on. "He came in here one night looking for Scatcherd; it was when he first came to Washington. Scatcherd has a habit of getting loaded and forgetting to go home. Well, the Senator comes in here, and Scatcherd was over there, sitting with his back to the door. Heh, heh! Scatcherd was giving his imitation of what he called the Senator's 'maiden speech.' Funny, too. He was a right good imitator. Well, you could of heard a pin drop, but nobody could stop him. Senator Greer just stood there—heh, heh, heh!—and when Scatcherd got through he clapped louder'n anybody. Well, Scatcherd didn't show around here for a month."

Colonel Primrose said absentmindedly, "That must have been funny." He was looking at the photograph.

They thanked Joe for the pho-

tograph and Colonel Primrose led the way outside.

"Run me over to Greer's," the Colonel said as they climbed into the car.

At Du Pont Circle Sergeant Buck volunteered some information. "Joe said that fellow Blair got stewed to the gills last night, sir. First time he'd ever seen him do that."

"Oh? Where is he now?"

"Joe said we might find him at Fage's."

"All right, Buck. You find out where Fage lives, and go there. See if you can find Blair. I'll be at Headquarters from ten-thirty on."

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Primrose nodded to the policeman on duty at Senator Greer's door and went in. He went through the hall and into the drawing room. Tracy Scatcherd was sitting bolt upright in one of the Senator's Jacobean chairs. Captain Brady sat across the table from him.

Colonel Primrose went over to the table. "Mr. Scatcherd," he said, "where were you last night between ten-fifteen and eleven-fifteen o'clock?"

Scatcherd's lips trembled as he replied. "I will not divulge my whereabouts at that hour," he said.

"Then I'll divulge for you," said Colonel Primrose. "The secret you have been trying to keep is that Senator Greer did not go out of this house last night."

Captain Brady looked startled. Scatcherd stared at Colonel Primrose.

"He did not make an address over the radio last night, Mr. Scatcherd. It was *you* who made it. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir. You are right."

Colonel Primrose held up a hand as Brady started to speak. "May I ask one more question, Captain? Then I'll turn him over to you." The Captain nodded.

"Mr. Scatcherd, was Senator Greer aware that you were speaking for him on the radio?"

"He was, sir," Scatchard said. "I have made all Senator's radio talks for the last year."

The colonel stood up, thanked the captain, bowed to the secretary and left the room. Downstairs he got into his car, said to Sergeant Buck, "Now we'll investigate your lead on Andy Blair, Buck."

A few minutes later Sergeant Buck stopped the car in front of a small, dingy hotel.

"Sure he's here, Buck?" said Colonel Primrose.

"Mr. Marius Fage came out and got coffee and rolls at the station lunchroom, and took 'em back, sir. Chambermaid reported there's another fellow in his room."

They crossed the small, deserted lobby to the elevator that was run by a very old Negro. At the sixth floor they stepped out into a dark

hall. Buck knocked briskly on door number six-oh-nine.

"Oh, shut up and come in," a tired voice said.

Colonel Primrose entered the darkened room, went to the window and let up the blue shades. He turned and stood looking down on the disheveled figure hunched in a cheap, upholstered armchair beside the table, holding his head in his hands.

"Blair," he said. "I want to ask you some questions."

"Get out of here!" Andy Blair thrust his head deeper into his cupped hands.

"Mr. Blair!" said Colonel Primrose. "The police are looking for you."

Andy threw up his head savagely, blinked at the light. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name's Primrose," said the Colonel. "John Primrose. I've got a roving commission in the Police Department. Hadn't you better get back to your rooms?"

A voice came from the door. "What's the matter with *this* room?" it said.

Colonel Primrose turned. A tall, dark-haired man with an ugly, angular face, long nose, and intelligent brown eyes stood in the doorway. He had a bath towel over one arm and a celluloid soap box in his hand.

"We haven't got a private bath here," he said with a grin. "Your turn, Andy." He turned back to Colonel Primrose. "My name's Fage. This is my room. Have a seat."

"Thank you," said Colonel Primrose. He sat down in the straight chair with the torn rush bottom.

"My friend Andy," said Fage, "drank too much last night." He hung up the towel and put the soap box on the washstand. "He doesn't feel very well this morning."

"For heaven's sake shut up," said Andy Blair.

"I won't shut up. I'm trying to explain to the Colonel here just what's the matter with you."

"I went to see Miss Cameron this morning, Blair," Colonel Primrose said. "She—"

He stopped as Andy Blair's body contracted like a steel spring. "Why?" he said.

"She was quite ill, the maid said. I didn't see her."

Blair got to his feet, swayed unsteadily. "Where's my hat?"

"You didn't have one," Fage said.

Colonel Primrose said, "I'll take you wherever you're going. My car is outside."

"Thanks," said Andy. He groaned. "What a head I've got! You'd better come along too, Ichabod."

"Okay, fellow," Marius Fage said.

The two went out into the hall. Following them, Colonel Primrose bent down, picked up a small

piece of dank black stuff from the room's wool carpet. He put the burned piece of cloth into his vest pocket, followed them into the hall, Buck behind him.

Marius Fage craned his long neck between the iron grills of the elevator cage. "It's down," he said. "We'd better walk."

"I'll wait for it, I think," Colonel Primrose said with a smile. "My knees aren't what they used to be."

"We'll wait in the lobby for you, Colonel," Marius said. "I need cigarettes." He steered Andy Blair toward the door labeled *Stairs*.

When they had disappeared Colonel Primrose turned to Buck.

"Call up Brady first chance you get and tell him to have a look at Blair's left trouser knee."

VI

It was two o'clock that afternoon when Buck parked the car in front of the Belmont. The pasty-faced young man at the desk recognized Colonel Primrose.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "Miss Cameron's still sick. Any message?"

"Yes," said Colonel Primrose. He scribbled a few words on a card. "Send this up. I'll wait."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you on night duty?"

"Yes, sir, all this month."

"Do you remember what time the Camerons went out last night?"

An avid gleam came into the clerk's eyes. "You're a detective?" he said quickly.

"I'm connected with the police," Colonel Primrose admitted.

"Is it about the Greer murder?"

"Yes."

"You're on the right track. Senator Greer used to call her all times of the day, and send her flowers. She—"

"Do you know what time they went out last night?" Colonel Primrose interrupted politely.

"The old gentleman—her father—went out around eight. She stayed in. I remember because a guy that's always camping on her trail—Blair's his name—came in just after Cameron left." The clerk looked at Colonel Primrose with an eager light in his eyes.

A few minutes later, in the living-room of the Camerons' apartment, a pale Nina Cameron faced Colonel Primrose. She sat primly, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes fixed on him.

"Miss Cameron," he said, "what happened to Mr. Blair last night?"

She stared at him with wide, startled eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Mr. Blair came here, a little after eight."

She nodded.

"What happened, Miss Cameron?"

Her stubborn little chin tilted. "I'll tell you what happened," she said harshly. "Andy came here

with an article he'd written about Mr. Greer. It accused him of—oh, terrible things! He brought it to me to read. And I read it."

Her voice broke, tears showed in her dark eyes. "I was furious at him. I—I threw the article in the fire."

She looked at Colonel Primrose like a small, defiant child who expects a stern rebuke.

"What did Mr. Blair do then?"

She said slowly, "He was very angry. He was so proud of his article. He said it was a masterpiece of truth. He just stood there, staring at it while it burned to ashes. Then he left. He turned and ran from the room. There's his hat. He—he didn't even come back for it."

"What happened after that, Miss Cameron?"

"Father was out and I couldn't bear to be alone. I went out, went to a movie on F Street."

Colonel Primrose hesitated. "Alone?" he said gently.

She nodded.

"You didn't go to Senator Greer's house last night, Miss Cameron?"

She shook her head, her eyes steady under his gaze. He stood up. "Well, Miss Cameron," he said, "if I were you I'd write a note to Mr. Blair and apologize."

She shook her head. "I can't."

Colonel Primrose smiled a little. "Goodby," he said. "I'll try to make things as easy for you as I can, Miss Cameron."

She held out her hand. "Thank you so much," she said.

Colonel Primrose took her hand in his. It was cold and he glanced down at it involuntarily, his eyes caught by the color of the nail polish—a vaguely familiar color. It was pale pink lacquer polish. And on the middle finger of Nina Cameron's right hand a small, triangular wedge of dull white nail showed where the lacquer had chipped off.

"Goodby, Miss Cameron," he said gently, releasing her hand.

A short while later the Colonel rubbed his hands vigorously together in front of the open fire in his own study.

"The older I get, Buck," he said cheerfully, "the more I like my own chair in front of my own fire."

"That's natural, I guess, sir."

Colonel Primrose sat down and straightened out his right leg with both hands. He cocked his head down and glanced around at the Sergeant.

"What makes young people tell unnecessary lies, Buck?" he inquired.

"It's their nature, sir," said Sergeant Buck moodily.

"But they're so transparent."

"Got to be, sir."

Colonel Primrose stared at the impassive face of his assistant. Yes, nature had trussed Phineas Buck up and dipped him bodily in a vat of liquid granite. But few people knew how thin the

coat had dried; nobody but Colonel Primrose knew how positively maudlin with sentiment was the heart it covered. Only he could gauge the extent of the sadness creeping now into Sergeant Buck's iron soul.

"You ain't going to give that girl away, Colonel, are you?" the Sergeant said suddenly.

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "But there's the clerk at the Belmont, Buck. He's a great talker."

Sergeant Buck's underslung jaw jutted out a little. "He won't talk, sir. I just told him if he said a word about that little lady I'd smash his pasty mug into jam."

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "Sergeant!" he said. "Why in heaven's name did you do that?"

Sergeant Buck rose, stalked rigidly out, and returned with a large cardboard folder in his hands. Colonel Primrose took out the photograph it enclosed. A calm, lovely face framed in dark curls looked up at him through the dark, passionate, and very sweet eyes of Nina Cameron.

"Where did you get this, Buck?"

"The little Japanese, sir."

Colonel Primrose stared. "Kitamura?"

Sergeant Buck's eyes were examining the back of his hairy fist.

"It was this way, sir. Kitamura had hidden this picture of the little lady. He said she was a samurai—that means she's okay. He hooked the picture off the Senator's bureau so it wouldn't be plastered in all the papers. He stuck it under the carpet in the dining room and I found it when I searched." He turned to the door. "Guess I'd better see Lafe about some supper, sir."

Colonel Primrose watched the broad, solid back disappear through the door. The smile on his face faded slowly as he looked down at the picture in his hands.

He was still looking at it when he heard the tinkle of the door bell. That would be Brady . . . . He bent down with an effort, thrust Nina Cameron's picture neatly under the rug.

"Hullo, Brady," he said cheerfully as the Homicide man entered. "How's it going?"

"Rotten," said Captain Brady. "Can't tell the time of death by the stomach contents because the Senator didn't feel well Tuesday afternoon and had only a little broth for supper. Cameron's been appointed to the Senate in Greer's place. And this fellow Scatcherd hot-foots it out the minute we let him go and calls up a woman—a Mrs. Ash. She lives in the D'Orsay. Will you go and see her?"

"Yes. I'll see her this evening."

Later, as the colonel sat in Mrs. Ash's living room he realized the stories of her great charm were not exaggerations.

Lynn Ash surveyed her visitor

with a gay, mocking smile in the cool depths of her gray-green eyes, spoke in a teasing, caressing voice. "Colonel Primrose, do I offer you something to drink, or is that suborning perjury?"

"It depends on what you offer me," said Colonel Primrose.

"Brown sherry—*very* old, even for brown sherry."

"Excellent."

He watched her move across the room, lithe and elegant, to the mahogany cellaret standing against the wall under the girandole.

"Mrs. Ash," he said, with the candid, open smile that women had responded to for many years —some too readily, if the truth were told, and Sergeant Buck sometimes told it. "I'm going to find out what your connection with Greer was. So you might as well help me out."

"I've been wondering how long it would take you to get around to me," she said. "I have no connection with Senator Greer's death, Colonel Primrose. I was employed by Star Utilities to try and keep him from supporting the Administration's power bill this season. That's my only connection."

"And Mr. Greer's secretary, Mrs. Ash?"

"Tracy kept me in touch with Mr. Greer's state of mind," she replied. "You mustn't hold it against him. He was entirely unaware of it."

"Did you hear that radio address?" Colonel Primrose asked.

"You mean did I know it was Tracy, not Senator Greer?"

"Yes," Colonel Primrose said. He liked her directness.

"I knew Tracy was talking. He told me he was going to. I'd accused him of it, one time, and he admitted he made radio speeches for the Senator."

"Mrs. Ash," said Colonel Primrose gravely, "who murdered Greer?"

"I don't know, Colonel Primrose," Lynn Ash said quietly. "I'm sure it wasn't Tracy, if that's what you mean. He's not man enough. It takes—guts to shoot a man like Mr. Greer."

VII

It was half past eleven when Colonel Primrose left Lynn Ash's apartment. He did not quite remember how they had got off the subject of the murder of Senator Greer. But he left with the feeling that Lynn Ash was a delightful and very beautiful woman, the knowledge that she was usually alone in the evening, and he noted as he left that she lived three blocks from Newland Road.

As he walked slowly down Massachusetts Avenue, his chin hunched down in his overcoat, his hands deep in his pockets, he became aware of a far-off shouting. It focused in his mind as a boy darted across the avenue shouting, *"Extra Paper! Read all about . . ."*

He reached in his pocket for a

nickel and took a paper. The boy dashed off. Colonel Primrose stopped under a street lamp and read the headlines: *Newspaper Man Arrested for Murder of Senator Greer. Andrew Blair . . .*

Colonel Primrose stopped reading and stared blankly out into the street. Then he thrust the paper into his pocket, hailed a cab cruising down the wide street. "Police Headquarters," he said. Half a block along he knocked at the window. "Make that Graeckel's Hotel, Fourteenth and F," he said. Now was as good a time as any to see Fage . . .

Marius Fage opened his eyes, turned over, and closed them. A minute later he opened them again, glared at the door.

"Go away!" he shouted. "I'm asleep!"

"It's Colonel Primrose, Fage. I've got to see you."

Marius Fage got up, unlocked the door, peered out.

"I thought you were that fool that kept me up all last night," he muttered, tying the cord of his bathrobe. "Come in."

"Sorry to disturb you."

" 'S all right. Come in. Have a seat."

"They've arrested Blair," Colonel Primrose said.

"Oh, for cripes sakes," Fage groaned. He pushed lank black hair off his high, pale forehead and stared at Colonel Primrose. Then he grinned suddenly. "Wish they'd done it last night," he said. "What's the dope? You see him?"

"No," said Colonel Primrose. "But I can guess what's happened."

"Can't we all?" said Marius. "The poor dub."

"What I'd like to know, Fage, is what time Blair came here last night?"

"He was here when I got here about midnight. Stewed to the gills."

"Did he say where he'd been?"

"All I know is he and the girl friend had a row over his article. He was crying mad."

"That article," said Colonel Primrose, "never got to his city editor."

"I know it. Good thing, too. I tried to find him before dinner to tell him to chuck it."

"Why?" said Colonel Primrose curiously.

"Because the hand was in."

"What do you mean?" Colonel Primrose cocked his head down and fixed a keen black eye on Marius Fage.

"I mean Greer had tossed in the sponge. He was coming out strong for everything Blair was calling him a so-and-so for fighting."

Colonel Primrose stared at him. Then he said, "I don't understand. Didn't you hear Greer's talk on the radio last night?"

"Yeah," Marius said, "I heard it. And was I plenty dumbfounded. There I sat, wondering why Tracy was holding out on

Mrs. Ash—I had dinner with her; she's a power lobbyist, been working on the Senator through Scatcherd. It was pretty plain she didn't know what was coming. When I heard that talk I thought Greer had pulled a fast one, and was sick. Until eight o'clock this morning when I got a paper."

"Listen, Fage," said Colonel Primrose sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I was with Senator Greer in his office from five-fifteen to six yesterday afternoon, and I knew he was going on the air at ten-thirty to come out for *public ownership,* and he was taking his whole crowd along. That's what I mean. I was helping him write his speech. All very confidential, Colonel. But I practically *wrote* the speech."

He leaned forward, his eyes burning. "But the speech that white-livered secretary gave over the radio last night had not one single word in common with the speech that John Greer and I finished writing at six o'clock last night!"

Fage got up. His deep voice was vibrant with anger, his tall, lean frame shook. Suddenly he relaxed, and a slow, pleasant grin spread over his homely, irregular features.

"That's the way it goes, Colonel," he said cheerfully. "And now, if it's okay with everybody I'm going back to bed. A night in jail'll do that young sap Blair a lot of good."

After leaving Fage the Colonel went directly to the office of the Homicide Chief.

Captain Brady shot a grim look across the top of his littered desk as Colonel Primrose took off his overcoat and pulled up a chair.

"What's this Blair business?"

"Looks bad," Captain Brady said. "That was a good steer you gave us about the knee of his pants. Had grass stain on it. He slipped on the garden path out there at the Senator's house. We had a look there again, and we found just where he did it."

"Really?" said Colonel Primrose. "What does he say about it?"

"Not a word. Refuses to talk."

"Is that all the evidence?"

"No. We found this on him."

Captain Brady took a card out of the leather folder on his desk and handed it to Colonel Primrose. It was a traffic summons dated the day before. The charge was parking in front of a hydrant, the time ten-forty p.m.

Colonel Primrose said patiently, "What's this got to do with the murder of Senator Greer?"

"The hydrant," Captain Brady said deliberately, "is in front of Greer's house on Newland Road in Massachusetts Park. Laugh that off if you can."

Colonel Primrose was silent.

"I figure this is what happened," Brady went on. "Blair

went out there to see Greer. He probably didn't know Greer was supposed to be talking on the radio. Lost control of himself when he saw Greer and hauled off and popped him. He's a hot-headed young devil, as you may know."

There was a look of distress on Colonel Primrose's face. "I know," he said, "I know. But—well, what in the name of heaven was he running around the house for?"

Brady frowned, shook his head.

"Why didn't he tear up the parking ticket?"

"Too excited, maybe."

"Was it excitement that made him take Greer's watch and throw it in the hedge, to let everybody know what time he was there."

Brady scowled. "That one has me puzzled too," he said frankly.

Colonel Primrose shook his head vigorously. "It's too weak, Brady," he said. "That watch is an important clue, if we can find out how it was smashed. But Blair is too smart to leave it in that hedge if he was the killer. Isn't that pretty obvious?"

Brady nodded. "We're working on another lead now. But the clerk out at the Belmont swears he never saw Miss Cameron leave the apartment last night."

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "What does *she* say?"

"I can't see her. I went there myself. Her father came to the door, said she was ill. I could have insisted on seeing her, but I had the impression it would have been over another dead body. One dead Senator is enough, Colonel." Brady laughed.

The Colonel cocked his head down and shot an amused glance sideways at the Chief of the Homicide Division. "And our friend, Scatcherd?"

"He's a worm," Brady said gruffly, "but he's got an alibi. Absolute. Anyway, you can look at him and tell he hasn't got the guts to kill a man."

"That's practically what Mrs. Ash told me an hour ago," said Colonel Primrose. "She knew, by the way, that it was Scatcherd on the radio."

Captain Brady pulled open a drawer of his desk. "There's something here I haven't shown you yet," he said grimly.

He took an envelope out of the drawer and handed it to Colonel Primrose. It was addressed to Senator Greer and was badly soiled. Colonel Primrose opened it and saw the letterhead of a well-known firm in Wall Street. He read the letter and handed it back.

"Where did it come from?"

"Anderson found it in Greer's back garden, under a lot of leaf mold."

"Ah," said Colonel Primrose. "Blackmail?"

"Looks like it. It's sure not the sort of letter a United States Senator would like to have made

public. Of course, Greer wasn't working for the public. Look at that radio talk of his. All out for the power interests."

"That," said Colonel Primrose, "is one of the things I came to talk to you about. Marius Fage helped Senator Greer write his speech for that radio talk. And he says it was the *exact opposite of the speech Scatcherd gave.*"

Captain Brady stared at him, speechless, for a minute. Then he reached violently for the telephone.

Colonel Primrose put a restraining hand on his arm. "Wait," he said. "Don't rush him. Remember, Scatcherd's got a watertight alibi. No use showing your hand. Now, I want to know what your twenty men have been doing?"

Captain Brady's eyes glittered dangerously. "My twenty girl scouts, you mean," he snarled. "All they do is bring in perfect alibis for everybody connected with the case. Look at 'em!" He held up a sheaf of typed memoranda.

"Here's one for you. I sent him out to get a line on Greer's private life. He comes back with a list of his contributions to sixty charities and four symphony orchestras. Symphony orchestras! I tell him to find out if Greer was a great lover and he turns me up a great music lover!" He tossed the papers onto his desk.

Colonel Primrose took the papers. "Let me just have a look," he said.

VIII

"He's here, sir," said Sergeant Buck, setting down the basket of wood. "Mr. Cogswell. Shall I bring him in?"

"Who?" asked Colonel Primrose. He glanced up from the account of Andy Blair's arrest in the morning paper.

"The doorman from the D'Orsay. Cogswell's his name. I told him to come around."

Colonel Primrose put down his paper. "Bring him in, Buck."

Mr. Cogswell was large and well-fed. He was also ill at ease. "Against the rules for me to do this, Colonel," he said, casting a sideways glance at Sergeant Buck. "It's only because of Mr. Buck here that I'm letting on. They'd fire me if they thought I was giving out information."

"It's about Mrs. Ash, sir," Sergeant Buck said.

Colonel Primrose waited.

Mr. Cogswell lowered his voice. "That Tuesday night, sir, when Senator Greer was shot, about half past nine a gentleman comes and asks to see Mrs. Ash. I ring her bell and nothing happens. But I knew she hadn't gone out. He says he's got to see her, can I send up to see if maybe the phone's not working.

"Well, I go up myself, Colonel. I rap, and no answer. I knock again. There ain't any answer, so

I unlock the door and go in."

Mr. Cogswell stopped for breath, then continued with a glance that was both meaningful and puzzled. "Everything okay, Colonel, nothing wrong. But Mrs. Ash ain't there."

Colonel Primrose looked steadily at him. "What time was that, Cogswell?"

"Well, I rang at nine-thirty-five first, and I was up there six or seven minutes, making it just about quarter to ten when I left."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"But that ain't the funny part of it, Colonel. About ten-thirty-five the house phone rang, and it was Mrs. Ash, in her room, as cool as you please. She asked me had her car been put away, to see if she'd left a vanity case on the seat."

Colonel Primrose thought a minute. "Do you remember the name of the man who called on Mrs. Ash?"

"I've got his card," Cogswell replied. He took a billfold out of his pocket. "Here it is, sir . . . Mr. James Howard Quinn."

Colonel Primrose smiled. "It doesn't seem to have occured to you, Cogswell, that she could have been visiting someone in the building? A neighbor on her floor, perhaps?"

A puzzled frown creased Mr. Cogswell's features. "I didn't think of that, sir."

"Well," said Colonel Primrose kindly, "it's always best, in my experience, to find simple explanations of things when you can. Senator Greer wasn't murdered, in any case, until quarter of eleven. And you're the best witness there is that Mrs. Ash had been in her apartment for ten minutes then."

"Almost," he murmured as Mr. Cogswell left, "too good a witness."

A few minutes later the Colonel left his house and rode across town to see the Homicide Chief.

Captain Brady put down his sandwich, motioned Colonel Primrose to a chair, said: "Latham agrees with you about Blair and thinks we couldn't get a conviction on the evidence against him."

"Is that why you let him out?"

"One of the reasons. I saw the Cameron girl and I'm telling you, Colonel, it wouldn't take her half a minute to make up her mind and shoot as straight as a die."

Colonel Primrose smiled. "Assuming there's a gun handy?" he said. "However, that's true of any woman, Brady. They haven't a lick of sense when aroused emotionally. And it seems to me you're leaving out all the points that really matter. Here you've got this file, Scatcherd. I tell you, man, *he knew Greer was dead when he came in the house!* If he hadn't known it he'd never have had the guts to come back after he'd given that radio talk. Don't you see—Scatcherd threw away the speech Greer gave him to read

over the radio, the one Fage and Greer wrote—and substituted a speech that said the opposite to what Greer meant to say?

"I tell you, Brady, the point we've got to go back to, and start from, is this: *Scatcherd knew Greer was dead when he came back that night at twelve-thirty.* Greer, in my opinion, was killed *before* ten-forty-three. And furthermore, whoever killed him was a cool and shrewd individual."

Brady shook his head. "Maybe you're right, Colonel. But I've got to follow the evidence. I can't just look at people the way you do and say, 'You're innocent' or 'You're guilty!' I've got to have evidence."

"What about the burned handkerchief in the fireplace?"

"No blood on it. It was just a plain, coarse linen handkerchief, the sort you buy for ten cents in a slot machine. And no fingerprints on the andirons."

The Colonel nodded, said thoughtfully, "I think I'll go over and have another chat with that Japanese butler . . ."

The police captain walked the Colonel to the door. Outside in the street the crime consultant paused on the curb, then hailed a cab and gave the driver Senator Greer's address.

A policeman let Colonel Primrose into the dead Senator's house. Without removing his coat the detective went directly to the kitchen. He found Kitamura sitting, legs crossed under him, in the middle of the kitchen floor, polishing the tall seven-branch silver candelabra.

The little butler got to his feet with the swift litheness of a house cat.

"Yes, sir," he said politely.

Colonel Primrose came in and closed the door behind him. He pulled up a high stool, perched himself on it, and regarded the little Japanese critically.

"Kitamura," he said, "I know Miss Cameron came here to see Senator Greer Tuesday night."

The smooth yellow lids closed down over the butler's eyes, leaving his face as expressionless as a frog's. He said nothing.

"Did she come here often?"

"Miss Cameron is here once before," the Japanese said slowly. "Mostly she eats lunch with Senator near Arlington. She is a very nice lady."

"Yes," Colonel Primrose said. "What time did she come Tuesday night?"

"I meet her coming down the hill as I go up. She is very turned over."

"Ah," said Colonel Primrose. "You mean upset?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time was that, Kitamura?"

"Five minutes past nine, sir."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Now, Kitamura," he said. "I want you to sit down over there . . ." He pointed to a low stool

beside the elaborate metal sink.

"And I want you to tell me everything you did and saw from the minute you found out Senator Greer was dead. Everything that was unusual."

Kitamura ducked politely, and drew out the stool. He sat down, stared at his feet and thought. The Colonel on the high stool and the butler on the low stool looked like a pair of dunces in a practice kitchen.

"Ready?"

"Yes, sir. Senator is dead, which is not usual," he said gravely. "The room smells like burning cloth. I look to see if there is a spark on the carpet, but there is not one. Also, the radio is not turned off, which is not usual. It is usual for it not to play, but only when it is not on."

"You mean," said Colonel Primrose, "that the light at the dial was on, but there was no sound?"

Kitamura ducked. "Yes, sir."

"And you turned the radio off?" the Colonel asked.

"No, sir, I do not touch anything but telephone."

Colonel Primrose tried to remember Tuesday night. "Was that radio on when I got here?" he said.

"No, sir. The first policeman say quick without stop to think, 'Turn off that radio, Mike, and arrest the Jap.'"

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "And when did you get Miss Cameron's photograph, Kitamura?"

"I go at once up into Senator's room and take the photograph and go downstairs. Then later I give it to the very big man with child's heart."

Colonel Primrose was about to chuckle again when a sudden light broke into the hitherto foggy recesses of his mind.

"Kitamura," he said, "Wait right here. I'll be back . . ."

He passed the uniformed officer at the library door, closed the door carefully, and went over to the radio that stood against the wall within arm's length of Senator Greer's chair. He looked at it thoughtfully. The dial was set at 58, station WCY. A sudden light flickered in Colonel Primrose's eyes.

He opened the cabinet door. A moment's search disclosed a card on which was printed the dial numbers of the leading stations. Colonel Primrose nodded with sober satisfaction . . . If Senator Greer had been sitting there at ten-forty-three, he would have been listening to the speech his secretary was making for him at that hour. But his own talk was over WCB, and the dial number of WCB was 314.

Colonel Primrose got up, went to the telephone, and called the *Morning Sentinel's* radio editor.

"I should like to know what was being broadcast over WCY,

at ten-forty-three last Tuesday night, please," he said.

In a moment a crisp young voice at the other end of the wire said, "Bedtime Beauty Hints for Women Who Work All Day. On each Tuesday, same hour."

"Thank you very much," said Colonel Primrose politely. "Now will you please give me a list of the programs on WCY from nine o'clock to half-past eleven last Tuesday night?"

He took an envelope and a pencil out of his pocket, and copied down the station's program for two-and-a-half hours of Tuesday evening, as it came over the telephone. When he had put down the phone he looked at the list. It was a very interesting list, from Colonel Primrose's point of view:

9:00— 9:15	*Civic Talk*
9:15— 9:30	*The Nut House Nutsies*
9:30—10:00	*The Musical Arts Bach Recital*
10:00—10:15	*The Soupy Saps*
10:15—10:30	*Tomboy Tunes*
10:30—10:45	*Bedtime Beauty Hints*
10:45—11:00	*Just Plain Folks*
11:00—11:15	*News*
11:15—11:30	*Inspirational Bedtime Talks*

There was a twinkle in Colonel Primrose's eyes as he read over the program that Senator Greer must have listened to if he was killed at ten-forty-three Tuesday night. It was preposterous, in the first place, and there was some specific fact that he had heard not long ago . . . Colonel Primrose's mind groped. Suddenly it came back to him. The scene in Captain Brady's office, and Brady saying, "I tell him to find out if Greer was a great lover and he turns me up a great music lover!"

Colonel Primrose looked at the program jotted down on the back of the envelope, and thought of the man who was supposed to have listened to it. Senator Greer, contributor to four symphony orchestras, the man with a Cezanne hanging over his mantel would never listen to such a program!

His twinkling black eyes fell once more on the item presented between ten and ten-fifteen. He chuckled, picked up the telephone and called Headquarters.

"Captain Brady there? Get hold of him at once. Colonel Primrose speaking. Tell him Senator Greer was murdered between nine-thirty and ten o'clock. Yes. Tell him to get Mrs. Ash, at once!"

IX

Captain Brady deposited his hat and overcoat on the chair.

"I got your message, Colonel," he said. "I went immediately to Mrs. Ash's apartment. She's gone out. They don't know where.

We'll just have to wait until she returns."

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "I'm worried about her," he said. "I'm afraid she's playing with fire. What about that man, Quinn?"

"He went out at four and wasn't back by nine-thirty."

Colonel Primrose looked at his watch. "It's just ten-fifteen now," he said. He hunched forward in his chair. "I'm going to put all my cards on the table," he said . . . "Sergeant, answer that phone . . . And we start off again from two points—the watch set at ten-forty-three and the fact that Scatcherd knew Greer was dead when he came back to the Senator's house. We—"

"Yes, he's here," Sergeant Buck said into the phone. "Captain Brady."

Brady took the telephone. Colonel Primrose cocked his head down and watched him out of one bright eye. He saw the policeman's mouth pull into a thin, hard line.

"Okay," he said, and put down the phone. He reached for his coat. "Come on, Colonel."

"Bad news?"

"Bad enough. I'll tell you in the car . . . Hurry!"

Sergeant Buck stopped the car in Rock Creek Park at the second ford. Captain Brady sprang out and Colonel Primrose followed. There were two other cars and five dark-coated figures standing in the beam of the headlights.

He followed Brady past the silent men and they stopped beside one of the cars. Brady trained his flashlight on it. Colonel Primrose peered around his heavy shoulder and suddenly he felt sick.

It was Lynn Ash. She was slumped under the steering wheel, her bare head thrown back against the seat, her white throat livid with great purple blotches, her yellow hair gleaming, her face distorted in an agony of fear. Her gloved hands clutched at the empty air.

From somewhere—it seemed to Colonel Primrose to come from far away—a voice spoke. "Strangled!" it said. He knew that it was Captain Brady speaking.

Captain Brady opened the door of the car. Lynn Ash's brown suede bag lay on the floor between the gear shift and the emergency brake. It was open and a gold-enameled compact had rolled out and lay under her right foot, which was propped against the brake. Captain Brady picked up the bag cautiously, turned his light into its white-kid interior.

There was a lipstick, a leather folder, a neatly folded handkerchief, and a small crystal flacon of amber-colored perfume. A delicate fragrance, subtle but compelling as Lynn Ash had been, rose around them. Colonel Primrose remembered the intoxicating subtlety of the perfume she wore

from last night. It was unusual and lingering.

He turned and moved across to his car, where Sergeant Buck was standing. They got into the car.

"The D'Orsay, Buck," Colonel Primrose said. "I want to see that apartment before Brady does."

On the following day Colonel Primrose sat next to Brady in the back of a stuffy, airless room and listened to the coroner's examination of the death of Lynn Ash. Mr. J. Howard Quinn was there, the last witness to be called. Large, gray-haired, steely-eyed, with an air of distinction and self-confidence, he completely dominated the scene.

"Mrs. Ash picked me up in front of the Vendome, where I had been seeing a business associate, about ten minutes of five. We drove out into the country to an inn where we had dined before, and sat in front of the fire talking until half past six, when we had dinner. We then drove back to town. Mrs. Ash dropped me at the home of a friend about fifteen minutes to nine. I stayed there until one o'clock and walked back to my hotel. I was informed of Mrs. Ash's murder at that time, and communicated at once with Captain Brady."

"Where was the deceased going after she left you, Mr. Quinn?"

"She did not say."

"Did anything she said indicate that she had any fear, or premonition, of such a tragedy?"

"Nothing." Mr. Quinn spoke quietly.

"Thank you, Mr. Quinn."

The verdict was, "Willful murder by a person or persons unknown."

Colonel Primrose went back to his home on P Street and drew his chair up to the desk in his study. He opened the middle drawer and took out a small black box. In it was his private collection of items too insignificant for him, so far, to bother the police with. He laid them out carefully on his desk pad, one by one . . . A tiny triangle of finger-nail lacquer. A fragment of a burned linen handkerchief. A small piece of leaf mold . . .

With them he put the letter he had found in the pocket of Mrs. Ash's coat that was hanging in her dressing-room closet. He viewed them with a rueful eye.

"Not much to hang a man on," he said to himself, staring thoughtfully out of the window at the dark leaves of the ivy shivering against the garden wall. "Nina Cameron," he thought, putting the pink lacquer bit to one side. "Andy Blair." He pushed the leaf mold alongside it. The letter followed. "Lynn Ash."

Colonel Primrose's bright black eyes rested on the burned piece of handkerchief. "You're X," he said aloud. "And when we've got you . . . well, God help you." He put the items back in his desk,

stood up. "Now for a visit with Mr. Fage," he murmured.

Marius Fage opened the door. "Come in, Colonel," he said. He stood aside for Colonel Primrose and Sergeant Buck. The Colonel sat down in the armchair and straightened out his right knee. Sergeant Buck took his usual post by the door.

Marius looked at him with a grin. "Am I being taken to the guard house, Colonel?"

"We'd like to take somebody there," Colonel Primrose said soberly. "No, we've come to see if you can help us out. You've heard about Mrs. Ash?"

An expression of pain came into Fage's lean face.

"It's a shame," he said quietly. "I didn't know her very well, and we were on opposite sides of the fence. But I wouldn't wish that sort of death on my worst enemy."

Colonel Primrose said, "Do you know Quinn?"

"Yes and no. I know who he is. I think you can thank him for what happened to Mrs. Ash."

"What do you mean?"

"He got her mixed up in this power business. She was working for his outfit."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Have you seen Captain Brady?"

Fage nodded. "He told me Greer was bumped off between nine-thirty and ten, not later." Marius grinned. "I guess that puts me in the running for chief marksman. I left Mrs. Ash's place, where I'd had dinner, just after nine. I walked down to Joe's because I didn't have any money; I'd dashed off without a red sou, forgot to take my wallet when I changed into dinner clothes. I met a chap going out to the British Embassy and he gave me a lift as far as Du Pont Circle where I borrowed a dollar from a friend of mine—Alice Lathrop, who lives just off the Circle. She was having a party and I stayed there half an hour or so. From there I took a bus to Joe's. And last night—"

He grinned, said, "Last night I went to bed about eight o'clock and slept like nobody's business, in spite of a bad cold."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Mr. Fage," he said, "how long have you known Tracy Scatcherd?"

"I've known that louse, man and boy, for five or six years."

"How long have you known Blair?"

"Just since he's been in Washington."

"Mr. Cameron?"

"Years. He was my ideal—can you beat it?—all through college."

"Isn't he, now?"

"You don't have heroes at my age, Colonel! Not live ones."

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "Maybe it's just your cold," he said. He went toward the door. "Thanks again, Fage."

Out in the hall he and Sergeant Buck waited for the elevator that came trundling slowly up the shaft.

The old Negro opened the door, and they got in.

"Nice day, sir," he said.

"Fine," Colonel Primrose agreed. "It's too bad Mr. Fage has such a cold."

"Yes, sir. That's what I says to him last night, but he jes' laffs."

"With that bad a cold he ought to be in bed. When did he get in last night?"

"He didn' *get* in las' night," the old darky said owlishly. "He never went out. Ah brung him up at six o'clock, then Ah brung him his supper an' put him to bed with a hot toddy, and Ah come up later to give him another one an' he was all in, sweatin' life a beef. He's better today."

X

Out on the street Colonel Primrose chuckled a little. "That cold was a lucky break for Fage, Buck," he said. "Now for your old friend, Scatcherd."

They drove across town to the Senator's house. The little butler answered the door bell when they rang. The Colonel asked to see the Senator's secretary and he led them to the study.

Tracey Scatcherd sprang nervously to his feet when Colonel Primrose came into the room.

"Oh, isn't it simply *terrible,*" he cried, "about Lynn Ash?"

"Yes, it was," Colonel Primrose said curtly. "She was a friend of yours, too, wasn't she?"

He caught the quick, appraising glance from behind the rimless pince-nez.

"Well, in a sense, Colonel. My position—"

Colonel Primrose interrupted rudely. "After we found Mrs. Ash in the Park," he said, "I went directly to her apartment and made a thorough search of it."

He saw Tracy Scatcherd's hands begin to shake and fine beads of perspiration gathering on his forehead.

"I found a letter," he went on slowly. "The mate to the one Captain Brady has."

To his amazement Scatcherd relaxed suddenly and the fear vanished from his eyes.

"I trust you'll return that letter to me, Colonel Primrose," Tracy said, in a relaxed voice. "It isn't the sort of thing the Senator would like out, and—"

"It's in safe hands," Colonel Primrose said. "How do you explain your radio talk?"

"Explain, sir? There's nothing to explain. I've always made Senator's radio talks for him—"

Colonel Primrose frowned. "Mr. Scatcherd!" he said. "Senator Greer was murdered, *not while you were on the radio, but before!*"

Tracy Scatcherd stared at him. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"Senator Greer was shot between nine-thirty and ten Tuesday night, Mr. Scatcherd. We also know that the speech you read over the radio was *not* the speech

Senator Greer gave you to read. In other words—"

A knock on the door interrupted Colonel Primrose. Scatcherd, pale-faced and shaking, went quickly across the room.

Kitamura was outside the door. "Captain Brady to see Mr. Scatcherd, please," he murmured politely.

Colonel Primrose took his hat off the table. "I advise you to start telling the truth, Mr. Scatcherd," he said.

The Colonel greeted Brady on his way out, then took his time going home. And in doing so he missed a visitor he would have enjoyed seeing. For, as he strolled out of the Senator's house, Nina Cameron simultaneously walked quickly up the stone steps of his own house on P Street.

She glanced nervously up and down the street and waited for her knock to be answered.

The door opened and an old colored man with white hair peered out at her through the opening. "The colonel ain't home, miss, I'm sorry," he said.

"When will he be here?"

"Ah dunno, miss. The Sergeant didn't say, miss."

"Listen, I'm Miss Cameron. I've simply *got* to see him!"

"Yes, miss. Ah understands. So you jus' come again, sometime when the colonel's home." He closed the door.

She stood on the doorstep, staring at the polished brass knocker. After a moment she laughed hysterically, ran down the steps, and went along the street towards the bridge to Massachusetts Avenue . . .

A few minutes later Colonel Primrose opened his house door —and stopped on the threshold, his key still in the lock. Sergeant Buck was standing inside the entrance, a smoking frying pan in his hand. The Colonel sniffed, looked enquiringly at the pan.

"I'm getting the smell of cabbage out of the house, sir," said Sergeant Buck stiffly. "Lafe said fresh burnt sugar would dispel the cabbage odor."

The colonel crinkled his nose. "An old custom," he said. "Burn one thing to dispel the odor of another thing . . . but it's just replacing one smell with another. Fortunately, I prefer the smell of burnt sugar to that of cabbage."

Colonel Primrose went into his study, removed his hat and coat and sat down at his desk.

Sergeant Buck tapped on the door a few minutes later, opened it and looked in. "Mr. Quinn is here to see you, sir," he said.

Colonel Primrose cocked his head down and raised an eye that was shining like an excited parrot's.

"Bring him in, Buck! Bring him in!" he said, rubbing his hands together.

Colonel Primrose rose as Mr. Quinn entered. The two men shook hands, surveyed each other

with eyes accustomed to appraising men.

"Sit down, Mr. Quinn."

Colonel Primrose moved his own chair out from the desk and sat down. But Mr. Quinn remained standing. His jaw was set in white ridges. His eyes were cold and hard as blue steel.

"Colonel Primrose," he said sharply. "I want the man who killed Mrs. Ash!"

"So do I, Mr. Quinn," said Colonel Primrose quietly. "If you'll sit down perhaps we can get somewhere on it."

Quinn sat down but remained as tense as a taut wire.

"Mr. Quinn, I understand Mrs. Ash was employed by you?"

"Yes, she was. She had the social connections needed for the job and she was a very superior person."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Mr. Quinn," he said, "on Tuesday night you tried to get in touch with Mrs. Ash?"

"I went to see her. She wasn't in. The doorman said she hadn't left the building, and I insisted he go up and see if her phone was, perhaps, cut off. She sometimes switched it off when she did not wish to be disturbed. But I thought if she knew it was I she would see me."

The Colonel nodded. "The doorman opened her door with his pass-key and found no one there."

Quinn nodded. "I tried again yesterday. She was in then and she agreed to have dinner with me."

"Mr. Quinn," said Colonel Primrose gravely, "do you think Mrs. Ash killed Mr. Greer?"

"No," Quinn said curtly. "I am sure she did not."

"What did you think when you heard that radio talk?"

"I was amazed—when I heard *about* it. I didn't listen to it. Greer had told me he was going to switch his speech and speak against private power."

"And it didn't occur to you, even then, that Mrs. Ash might have shot him to keep him from switching over?"

Quinn shook his head impatiently. "There was no point in it. If Greer died everyone knew the Governor would have to appoint Cameron in his place. And it's well-known that Cameron is anti-private power."

"Then there was—so to speak—no gain for you in Greer's death?"

"No," said Quinn drily. "From our point of view, it was just another set-back. We have them—we find another way of surmounting them."

Colonel Primrose said, "What did Scatcherd get out of all this?"

Quinn frowned. "Money," he said. "Mrs. Ash had her own arrangement with him. I don't know what it was."

"But you paid the bills?"

"Plenty."

"You had no record of what you paid him?"

"Mrs. Ash kept one."

"Where did she keep it?"

"In a black notebook she carried in her bag."

Colonel Primrose bent his head sharply to one side. "She had that book in her bag last night?"

"Of course. She consulted it to tell me how much we owed her."

"Last night?"

"Yes. Last night we wound up our business affairs."

"How much did you pay her?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"In bills?"

"Yes."

"But," said Colonel Primrose slowly, "she had no money, and no notebook, when *we* found her."

Mr. Quinn paled. "No!" he said. He raised a clenched fist to his head. "Then it's my fault! Someone killed her for that money!" Quinn rose and paced the floor. Suddenly he stopped beside Colonel Primrose's desk.

"Listen," he said. "I asked her to marry me last night. She said she had a job to do first, then she'd think about it. I begged her to let me do the job for her. She smiled that wonderful cool smile of hers, said it was a job that only she could do.

"I was worried about her. I asked her if it was a dangerous job. She laughed and said not to her but it might be to anybody else. Colonel, I think she knew who killed Greer—but she didn't believe for a moment that they'd kill her too!"

XI

After Mr. Quinn left, Colonel Primrose sat in his armchair, gazing into the fire. He thought about that five thousand dollars and the little black book that had disappeared from Mrs. Ash's bag. It was evidence he needed. A fragment of a burned linen handkerchief was not much to go on . . .

Colonel Primrose started upstairs. As he reached the hallway the old-fashioned bell at the kitchen door tinkled faintly.

Sergeant Buck came out of the living room and strode down the hall to open the door. Colonel Primrose waited on the stairs. Over Buck's thick shoulder he saw the scared face of the freckled-faced bellboy he had noticed in the lobby of the D'Orsay.

"Is Colonel Primrose home, sir?" the boy said. "I got to see him, personally!"

"Tell him to come in, Buck," Colonel Primrose called.

The boy slipped inside and stuck his cap in his coat pocket. He looked younger in his cheap store suit and his red, freckled hands stuck out from the frayed sleeves of an overcoat that might have been big enough several years before.

"You look cold, old fellow," Colonel Primrose said. "Stir up

the fire, Buck, then you can go on to bed."

He led the way into his study, and pulled a chair close to the fire. "Sit down, son. Now what's the trouble?"

"It's about—Mrs. Ash," the boy said nervously.

"Did you like Mrs. Ash, son?"

"Oh, gee, she was swell. Why, she paid my kid sister's hospital bill last year."

The corners of the boy's mouth quivered. He hurried on.

"It's about this guy, Mr. Scatcherd, that was always coming to see Mrs. Ash."

"Yes? What about him?"

"Well, tonight he came in and when I saw him whisperin' to Cogswell—he's doorman—I listened because I knew it would be Mrs. Ash they'd be talkin' about."

"What was said, son?"

"Mr. Scatcherd told Cogswell he'd give him a hundred dollars if he'd sneak in Mrs. Ash's apartment and find a little black notebook for him. Mr. Scatcherd said it must be there because she didn't have it with her when she was killed. I don't know what it's all about, but I thought you'd maybe like to know this, sir."

Colonel Primrose stood up, put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I liked Mrs. Ash too, son," he said. "And we'll do all we can to find her murderer. Thank you for trying to help us."

The boy's eyes were bright as they walked out into the hall. Sergeant Buck was there, waiting.

"I'll get the car out and take the kid home," the Sergeant said gruffly.

Colonel Primrose went back to his study and sat down. "If Scatcherd strangled Mrs. Ash," he murmured, "he'd have got the black notebook then—assuming that Quinn's on the level and she really did have it with her. And Scatcherd would know the police don't have the black book because he would have heard from them inasmuch as his name is in it."

He reached for the phone, called Captain Brady's home. A voice told him that the Homicide chief was on his way out to the Greer house to see Mr. Scatcherd . . .

Colonel Primrose was standing on the steps when Buck returned from taking the boy home.

"We're going over to Greer's house again," he said, and got in the car.

A short while later, in the drawing room of Greer's home, Tracy Scatcherd faced Captain Brady as Colonel Primrose joined them.

Captain Brady stood across a table from the white-faced secretary, a steel bracelet dangling from his hand as the Colonel entered the room. He nodded at Primrose.

"I'm trying to persuade Mr. Scatcherd to pull himself together and come quietly."

"Let me talk to him a minute,

Brady," the Colonel said.

His shrewd black eyes bored into Scatcherd's. "We know from Mr. Quinn, who had dinner with Mrs. Ash before she was killed, that she had a black notebook in her handbag—and five thousand dollars in currency."

Scatcherd's lips began to tremble.

"You've got that book, Scatcherd?"

"No!" Scatcherd cried. "No! I haven't got it!" He paused, glanced at the hard-faced Brady, screamed, *"I burned it! I burned it!"*

"When?"

"Tonight! I got it tonight, through the D'Orsay doorman! Then I burned it!"

"Scatcherd," Brady said icily, "I want the truth out of you. Don't leave anything out, and begin at seven o'clock Tuesday night."

Tracy Scatcherd raised his head from his hands. "I'm innocent!" he cried; "I'm a victim!"

"Begin at seven o'clock, Scatcherd."

Scatcherd spoke in a shaking voice. "I came home," he said. "I knew Senator had decided to support the Administration bill. I can't tell you what that meant to me."

"You don't have to," said Colonel Primrose drily. "We know —it meant you'd taken money under false pretenses. Go on."

"No, no! I'd *borrowed*—"

"Five thousand dollars?"

"No, no, it was only four thousand! Mrs. Ash lent it to me; then, on Monday, she said that if Senator switched his support she'd be wiped out and I'd have to pay her the money I owed. I couldn't pay; I haven't got a cent to my name."

"Is that why you killed her?" Captain Brady snarled.

"I *didn't* kill her!" Scatcherd screamed.

Colonel Primrose said, "Go on, Scatcherd!"

"Senator liked Fage, and Blair was making it hot for Senator in the press, and Nina Cameron was working on him; so finally he decided to go along with them. Well, I told Mrs. Ash it was all up, but she wouldn't believe me."

"Go on, Scatcherd."

"It was her idea for me to disregard the new speech Senator wrote and give the old one. While I was making the speech she was going to visit him, show Senator those two letters. After that, she thought he'd not say anything about me switching the speeches."

Captain Brady stared at him. "I don't get it," he said shortly.

"Oh, Senator *really* wanted to support private power, anyway. The letters were just to help keep him on that side."

"Go on, Scatcherd."

"So I told her I'd switch the speeches. I—I came home with Senator, then left at eight-thirty for the broadcasting station. But

I got to thinking, and worrying. And I—I decided I'd come back and tell Senator the whole thing, throw myself on his mercy before Mrs. Ash could see him. So I came back—"

"What time was that?"

"It was five minutes past ten when I got here. I came in, went directly to the library. He was sitting in the chair beside the radio. He didn't answer when I spoke to him. Then I went closer —and saw he was dead."

Colonel Primrose leaned forward. "What did you do?"

"I—I thought I'd better go on with it, pretend I didn't know. So I went back—"

"The watch, Scatcherd!" the Colonel said. "You took the watch, broke it and threw it in the hedge?"

Scatcherd's face grew whiter. He gave in with a gesture of despair.

"I—I was afraid, with everything pointing to me. Then I realized the radio talk could be a perfect alibi for me. I took his watch, turned the hands to ten-forty-three and knocked it against a brick out there on the terrace. I threw it in the hedge where I knew it would be found. Then I took a taxi to the radio station and made the speech . . ."

Colonel Primrose glanced at Captain Brady.

"I swear that's all I did! I made the speech, had a drink at Joe's, then came home. I went directly upstairs and waited for Kitamura to discover the Senator. Then the police came . . ."

"What about the black notebook? What's in it?"

"It had a list of the money Mrs. Ash loaned me. I burned it the minute I got my hands on it. The doorman at her house got it for me—"

The Colonel said, "No he didn't, Scatcherd. It was not in her room. It was in her bag. She had it with her when she was murdered . . . And what about the five thousand dollars, Scatcherd?"

"What's going on here?" asked Captain Brady angrily.

"Just a minute, Brady. What about the five thousand dollars, Scatcherd?"

"I don't know anything about it!" Scatcherd screamed.

A gruff voice spoke from the door. "Is this what you want, sir?" it said.

Sergeant Buck strode up to the table and laid a brown envelope before Colonel Primrose. The envelope had Quinn's firm name on it. The Colonel looked inside, handed it to Captain Brady.

"Mr. Quinn paid Mrs. Ash five thousand dollars last night," he said quietly. "She had it with her, and I guess this is it."

"That came to me by mail, too!" Scatchard cried frantically. "Today—late—I swear it!"

"Where did you get it, Buck?"

"In his bureau drawer, sir,

stuck in a wool sock. My friend, Mr. Kitamura, showed me where it was."

Scatcherd made a horrible effort to compose himself. "You've got to listen to me!" he cried. "The book and that envelope came tonight, about nine o'clock!"

"Where's the paper they were wrapped in?" said Captain Brady.

Scatcherd buried his head in his arms. "Oh, God!" he cried. "I burned it, too!"

Captain Brady got up. "You come with me," he said grimly.

XII

At eleven o'clock the next morning Sergeant Buck was sitting in the Colonel's chair with his feet on the Colonel's desk when the bell sounded from the kitchen. Sergeant Buck snapped into his usual spinal rigidity and went down the hall to the door.

Nina Cameron smiled up at him and Sergeant Buck's granite-coated face cracked with a pleased grin.

"Is Colonel Primrose in?"

"No, Miss, the Colonel ain't in, but he'll be in—"

He was interrupted by a voice from the front hall. "I have just arrived, Buck. Do bring Miss Cameron in out of the cold."

He came to meet her briskly, smiling. "Come along where it's warm," he said, and opened the door to his study. "Your friend Andy Blair was here this morning."

"How is he?"

"Andy? Oh, Andy's fine," said Colonel Primrose heartily.

"Colonel Primrose," she said quietly, "I've made a terrible mistake. You see, I didn't tell you the truth, because—I thought—"

"Because you thought Andy murdered Senator Greer," Colonel Primrose said briskly. "Now, what did you *really* do Tuesday night—now that we know Andy didn't murder Greer?"

Her red mouth quivered. "I was so angry when I read Andy's article . . . I thought I was really going to marry Mr. Greer then . . . So I—"

"You went to see the Senator," said Colonel Primrose patiently.

"Yes," she said. "It was a silly thing to do."

"Very," Colonel Primrose agreed.

"I got there, went onto the terrace when I saw the light in his library, and tapped on the window. He was sitting there reading, waiting for the Bach recital to come on the radio. He always listens to the Bach program. He let me in . . ."

"What time was that, Miss Cameron?"

"I got there a little after nine."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"During that talk I knew, suddenly, that I didn't want to marry Mr. Greer. And I—well, I told him so, right out."

She lowered her dark head and bit her trembling lip.

"He put his arms around me, said all he wanted was for me to be happy, that he'd known for some time it was really Andy I loved."

She stopped, looked at Colonel Primrose with an apologetic little smile. "I'm afraid I blubbered all over his shirt front. He was awfully sweet about it. As we stood there we heard a noise outside on the terrace. I jumped, and he said, 'That young fool! Leave, Nina, quickly.' He shoved me into the hall, closed the door after me. As I reached the street door I heard a shot."

The Colonel thought: *That's when she left a chip of her nail polish stuck to his sleeve.* He said, "You went on home without reporting the shot?"

"I didn't know what to do. I thought of what it would mean to my father if it were known I was there, and I thought if I got away maybe they'd never find out it was Andy. Because I thought it would be Andy, the way the Senator said: 'That young fool!' I got to Connecticut Avenue somehow and took a bus. I didn't go home; I was afraid father would notice I was upset. I went to a movie instead . . ."

"Your father was home when you got there?"

"Mary said he'd been there and had gone out again."

Colonel Primrose hesitated. He said, "Andy was there, of course, but it was after that. He didn't kill Greer."

She got up. "I'm taking too much of your time. I just wanted to tell you the truth, all I know. If—if you see Andy will you tell him I'm sorry?"

"I will," said Colonel Primrose gravely.

He picked up the phone as Sergeant Buck showed Nina Cameron to the door. When Captain Brady's voice came over the wire Colonel Primrose said, "Brady, I want a favor. Will you round up all our suspects and see that they're at Greer's house by five o'clock . . ."

At ten minutes to five Colonel Primrose and Captain Brady sat in the drawing room of Senator Greer's house.

"I think you're crazy as a coot," Captain Brady said, "having all those people come here."

"Maybe," said Colonel Primrose cheerfully. "All you've got to do is see that everybody's here. Buck and I'll do the rest."

The clock on the stairs struck five as the old bell in the kitchen sent its pleasant note tinkling through the house. Sergeant Buck appeared a few minutes later with guests. Colonel Primrose got up to shake hands with the distinguished white-haired member of the United States Senate, and to bow to Nina Cameron and the third guest.

"You know Captain Brady," he said. "Hello, Mr. Fage. You

know Miss Cameron and the Senator."

"How do you do, sir," said Marius. "Hello, Nina, how's it going?"

Nina Cameron held out her hand. "Hello, Marius. It's nice to see you. What is this, a party?"

Marius turned quickly at the sudden widening of Nina Cameron's eyes and saw Andy Blair standing in the door.

"Hello, Ichabod," Blair said. "Hello, Nina. How do you do, sir."

Andy bowed to Mr. Cameron and moved across to the other side of the room. The masterful figure of Mr. J. Howard Quinn appeared in the doorway then. It was not until he bowed curtly to the group and stepped aside that he revealed the small, dark form of Kitamura, bowing politely.

Colonel Primrose put his watch in his pocket.

"I think we are all here," he said quietly. He nodded at Sergeant Buck. Buck carefully closed the door, moved across the room to stand behind the seated company.

"Last Tuesday night," Colonel Primrose said, "Senator Greer was shot dead in the library of his home in Massachusetts Park. Last Thursday night Lynn Ash was murdered, strangled with two strong, savage hands, in her car in Rock Creek Park. Those two crimes were committed by the same person.

"John Greer, as you all know by this time, allowed his secretary, Mr. Scatcherd, to give his talks over the radio. That Tuesday night the Senator did not know that Mr. Scatcherd had agreed to sell him out, switch his talks. He stayed at home, unsuspecting; and he had several callers.

"One was Miss Cameron, another Lynn Ash. Miss Cameron came first and was talking to Senator Greer when Mrs. Ash arrived, armed with two damning letters calculated to keep Senator Greer in line, let herself into the house with a key given her by Tracy Scatcherd, in the belief that she could persuade Greer to overlook Scatcherd's breach of trust, agree to stay on the side of private power.

"Mrs. Ash was seen going to Greer's house. Seen by a man who had very strong reasons for wanting to know where she was going. He followed her, saw her enter Senator Greer's house—and he leaped to a conclusion entirely without foundation except in his own mind. Half mad with jealousy, this man went around the house and up on the terrace. A window blind there was partly open. Through it he saw a woman standing there, with Senator Greer's arms about her . . ."

Colonel Primrose stopped. Nina Cameron's head had drooped forward. Senator Cameron stared at the Colonel.

"The man at the window, blind

with jealous rage, did not see that the girl in Senator Greer's arms was *not* the woman he had followed. He pulled the gun he always carried. Senator Greer heard him on the terrace, at that point, and thrust the girl in his arms out of the room. He turned, then, to face the intruder. He expected Andy Blair but it was not Blair; and before he could do anything, or say anything, the intruder had shot him down in cold blood."

The even, sharply crisp voice stopped. The room was as silent as death. Then suddenly a subtle, delicate perfume pervaded the air, a distinctive, rare scent and it floated through the room like the lovely ghost of Lynn Ash.

For a moment the silence continued. Then someone drew a quick, spasmodic breath. Colonel Primrose glanced in the direction of the gasp just as there was wafted into the room another odor —the pungent smell of burning cloth. Then the silence was broken by a deep voice, rich and suave—the voice of Senator John Knox Greer.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the voice said, "I have stood behind the Administration in each and all of its efforts to serve the great majority of our people. I stand there still . . ."

There was a faint cry as Nina Cameron sank back in her chair. Andy Blair sprang towards her. He turned to Colonel Primrose, eyes blazing. "Damn you!" he shouted. "Do you think—?"

Then Andy Blair noticed that Colonel Primrose was not looking at Nina. His black eyes were fixed beyond her, steady and unwavering on the man sitting near the door.

"Mr. Fage!" he said. *"Mr. Fage!"*

Marius Fage sat hunched forward in his chair, staring dully at the floor, his high white forehead glistening with perspiration. He nodded, still staring down at the floor between his feet.

"Yeah," he said thickly. "Sure. I killed 'em."

He got slowly to his feet. "I . . . take me out," he said. "Tired of it anyway. I loved her. Now take me out."

Captain Brady was at his side; Sergeant Buck opened the door. They went out.

J. Howard Quinn went over to where Colonel Primrose stood looking down into the fire. He held out his hand without a word. Colonel Primrose gripped it. Mr. Quinn went out of the room.

No one noticed Tracy Scatcherd's entrance from the drawing room where he had waited in the dark for Colonel Primrose's signal. He stood blinking in the door, hesitated a moment, then turned and went on out.

Senator Cameron raised his bowed head. "Come, daughter," he said gravely. Nina shook her head. Her face was still pale

from the shock of Primrose's trap.

"No, Dad," she said softly. "I'm going to stay with Andy . . . if he'll let me."

Andy's arms closed around her. "Nina!" he said. His voice broke with the pent-up longing of years.

Colonel Primrose took Mr. Cameron gently by the arm. "A little sherry, Senator?" he said . . .

XIII

"It's odd," said Colonel Primrose, "how often tough, cynical men like Marius Fage blow up. I began to suspect him when Cogswell said he'd paid him to keep track of Mrs. Ash's comings and goings. It seemed unnecessary, for political purposes.

"You see, he followed her around, pretending it was part of his job. He must have waited outside her place that Tuesday night, watching, and followed her to Greer's. When he saw Nina Cameron in the Senator's arms and thought it was Mrs. Ash, he went into a jealous rage and he shot to kill.

"His story about that night was true, as far as it went. I doubt if you could have proved he killed Lynn Ash, Brady. The old fellow who runs the elevator at his hotel saw him at six and again around ten. The second time he brought a toddy for Fage's cold he said Fage was sweating heavily. The old fellow thought it was due to the first hot toddy. It wasn't; it was a nervous reaction to the horrible thing Fage had just done, and from rushing about. It was simple for Fage to leave his hotel and enter by the back stairs. He probably used the stairs to keep the old Negro from complaining about his going out with a cold."

"I don't get the idea of the burnt cloth yet," said Captain Brady.

Colonel Primrose chuckled happily.

"I didn't either, at first, but I felt it was important. Then I got to thinking about Fage and his nose. He's abnormally sensitive to odor. He'd developed a complex about Mrs. Ash; she was identified in his imagination with that expensive and distinctive perfume she used. This evening, for instance, his reaction to those smells was so strong that he couldn't restrain them. He just collapsed.

"You see, he was so aware of her that he thought everyone else would recognize her perfume in the Senator's room. That burned cloth was to make sure nobody would suspect that she'd been in Greer's library. It was a sort of insane thing in itself, because of course she actually *hadn't,* at that point, been there in that room, he just thought she had.

"Well, I felt sure Blair would never think of a thing like that. So I got the idea of someone's mixing up the two women—a case of mistaken identity. Burned cloth as a deodorant is a fine old

custom in Fage's state. Of course, there's no doubt he's a psychopathic case. It's a pity."

Captain Brady nodded gravely. "And he killed her . . ."

"When he realized she didn't love him. She may even have told him she was going to marry Quinn."

"And Scatcherd?" said Brady. "Where did he get the black book and the money from Mrs. Ash's purse?"

"Fage sent him the notebook and the money, of course. Clever thing to do. He had such contempt for Scatcherd that he had no scruples about trying to frame him."

Captain Brady looked at Colonel Primrose and grinned. Colonel Primrose cocked his head down sharply and looked across the room.

"Buck!" he said. "How about a night-cap?"

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a matter of fifty bucks

by . . . Edwin Baird

Harry had suspicions but no proof —until he was handed the fifty-dollar bill that paved the way to a deadly case of lead poisoning.

THE MAN had been drinking whiskey sours at the bar since noon. It was now three o'clock.

He seemed to be waiting for someone. He sat with his back to the wall, at a corner of the bar, and he kept watching the front door. He wore a derby hat pulled low on his brow, and he looked furtively from beneath its brim. He was a short, pot-bellied man of about forty-five.

At ten minutes past three a young man came in and climbed onto a stool near the center of the bar. The stocky man hunkered back in his corner and watched the young man from beneath the brim of his derby. It was apparent that this was the person for whom he had been waiting.

"How's it, Tim?" the young man said to the bartender. "Mix me up a silver fizz." He reached into a pocket and took out a fifty-dollar bill which he spread flat on the bar.

The pudgy man looked at the fifty-dollar bill with a peculiar intensity, his whiskey-reddened eyes peering from beneath his hat brim.

"Haven't you anything smaller

The human mind is a wonderful, and sometimes deadly, organ. It can invent precision instruments to save human life, and it can evolve weapons that bring death and destruction. It can also scheme and plan and dream—and sometimes its dreams add up to murder. Even those human dregs who give nothing good to society are beings with minds. As this story proves.

than this, Brownie?" asked the bartender. "My cash is sort of low."

"Sorry, Tim. Nothing smaller," the young man said.

The bartender turned to the stubby man hunched in the corner. "Can you break a fifty, Harry?"

Harry drew a wad of money from his trousers and peeled off four tens and two fives and gave them to the bartender. Then he put the fifty-dollar bill in his vest pocket and looked at the clock on the wall. It was twenty minutes past three.

"Watch my drink for me, Tim," Harry said. "I've got to make a couple of phone calls." He walked to the booth which was around a bend in the room and out of sight of the bartender and the baby-faced youth, opened the glass door and closed it with a bang they could hear. Then he walked on past the booth, and left the tavern by the alley door.

He ran down the alley until he reached the rear door of a run-down building that housed a hotel. He looked up and down the alley, saw that it was deserted.

He ducked quickly inside the back door of the hotel, stealthily mounted the rear stairs to the second floor. He hurried down a sooty hall, stopped before a door. Without knocking, Harry pushed the door open and strode into the room, closing the door behind him.

A blowzy blonde of about thirty-five lolled in a chair, reading a magazine and sipping liquor from a tall glass. "Well," she asked in a hard voice, "what's eatin' *you?*"

Harry glared at her. "You tramp!" he said between clenched teeth. He plucked the fifty-dollar bill from his vest pocket and held it before her. "Recognize this?"

She snatched the bill from his fingers, held it by one corner. "Sure I recognize it. I took it from you last night."

"And five minutes ago," he said, "I took it from your sapper. Damn you!" His left hand darted out and snatched the bill from her fingers. At the same time his right hand clawed at his hip pocket and jerked out a revolver.

The woman caught her breath sharply, started to rise. But she never made it. Two bullets struck her in the left breast and two more in the throat. She fell back into her chair, a quivering heap of soft white flesh.

Harry went out and closed the door behind him. He stole down the musty hall to a rear window that overlooked the alley. A loaded garbage truck was moving slowly below the window. He tossed the gun from the window and it landed in the garbage with scarcely a sound.

Then he ran down the steps, along the alley, and re-entered the tavern by the rear door.

The young man still sat on the

bar stool, gazing over the rim of his glass at the mirror in back of the bar. The bartender was studying a racing form.

Harry climbed back on his stool in the corner and picked up his glass. "Jeez, it's hot in that phone booth!" he said, and downed his drink in a gulp. Then he glanced at the clock on the wall. It was thirty-three minutes past three. "Mix me another one, Tim," he said.

Harry began talking to the bartender about the races, described a killing he'd made recently at Arlington. Taciturn before, he was now in a friendly, talkative mood.

Brownie said nothing. He drank his silver fizz and gazed in the mirror.

The hands of the clock were at twenty minutes past four when the front door opened and two wooden-faced men sauntered in and looked leisurely about. They had "police" stamped all over them. They walked over and leaned against the bar.

"Hi, Tim," said one of them.

"Hi, boys," said the bartender.

They looked at the thickset man.

"Hi, Harry."

"'Lo, Mike. Howdy, Frank."

One of the detectives said, "You know a woman named Temple, don't you, Harry? Lorna Temple, who lives at the Franklin Hotel?"

"Yeah, Frank, I've seen her around," said Harry. "Why?"

"She was found dead in her room a few minutes ago."

There was a silence. Brownie turned and stared at the officers.

Harry fished a piece of ice from his glass, his eyes intent on his fingers. "Dead?" he said. "What did she die of?"

"She died," said Mike in a flat voice, looking steadily at Harry, "of four bullet wounds."

Harry looked up. "When did it happen?" he asked.

"As near as we can tell, within the last hour," said Mike. "A maid found the body twenty minutes ago."

Harry said, "Say, that's too bad. Who did it?"

"You knew her pretty well, didn't you?" Frank said.

Harry shrugged his stocky shoulders. "About as well," he said, "as I knew any of the floozies along Clark Street. I used to see her around, and now and then I bought her a drink."

"As a matter of fact," said Frank, "you were seeing her regularly, weren't you?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," said Harry, taking the fifty-dollar bill from his pocket. "What you boys gonna have?" He put the bill on the counter in front of him.

The detectives refused his invitation to drink, but they both showed interest in his fifty-dollar bill.

Frank reached out and took the bill in his fingers and examined

it. A corner of the bill had been torn off, leaving a ragged, torn edge. He took an envelope from his pocket and from the envelope he took a fragment of green paper. Then he spread the bill on the bar and placed his bit of green paper against the torn corner. It fitted perfectly.

Frank turned and said, "How long you been here, Harry?"

Harry turned to the bartender. "How long have I been here, Tim?"

The bartender studied the clock. "I'd say about four hours. You came in around noon."

"And you haven't left here since?" the detective asked.

Harry said, "I ain't left this stool since I came in, except to make a few phone calls at the booth back there."

"In that case," said Frank, "the woman was killed earlier than we thought."

"You're as nutty as a monkey cage," Harry calmly told him, "if you think I had anything to do with it."

"See this, Harry?" said Frank, exhibiting the mutilated fifty-dollar bill. "There's a corner missing from your bill—and in the hand of the murdered woman we found the missing piece."

The thickset man was clearly untroubled by this news. He turned to the bartender. "Tim, where did I get that half-century note?"

"Why," said Tim, "you got it from Brownie here."

The detectives turned to the young man, whose face went suddenly pale.

"And how long," Mike asked the bartender, "has *he* been here?"

The bartender glanced at the clock. "He came in about an hour ago, Mike."

"That settles it," said the detective, and took a grip on the youth's arm. "Come along, fella."

"You crazy fools!" the young man snarled. "This is a frame! Let me tell you about that bill—"

"You got it from Lorna Temple, didn't you?"

"Yes, I got it from her. But she *gave* it to me. Wait 'til I tell you—"

"You can tell it to Homicide," said Frank. They dragged him from the stool. "You'd better come along too, Harry, as a witness."

"Okay, Frank. Be right with you, soon as I finish my drink." He lifted the glass to his lips.

The detectives almost carried the screaming youth out to the squad car parked at the curb. Harry, sipping his drink, watched them sadly. Then he sighed, turned back to the bartender.

"Don't it beat hell, Tim," he said, "what some guys will do for fifty bucks?"

the fountain plays

by . . . Dorothy L. Sayers

The fountain in the garden was an idyllic spot for lovers, or a dandy location for a quiet little murder.

SAID MR. SPILLER, in a satisfied tone, "Yes, I must say I like a bit of ornamental water. Gives a finish to the place."

"The Versailles touch," agreed Ronald Proudfoot.

Mr. Spiller glanced sharply at him, as though suspecting sarcasm. But the lean face was without expression.

Mr. Spiller was never quite at his ease in the company of his daughter's fiancé, though he was proud of the girl's achievement. With all his (to Mr. Spiller) unamiable qualities, Ronald Proudfoot was a gentleman, and Betty had made a good catch.

"The only thing it needs," continued Mr. Spiller," to *my* mind, that is, is opening up. Make a vista, I say. You don't get the proper effect with these bushes on all four sides."

"Mr. Spiller," said Mrs. Digby in her mild voice, "don't you think it makes rather a fascinating surprise? You come along the path, never dreaming there's anything behind those lilacs, and you turn the corner and come suddenly upon it. Why, when you brought me down to see it this

A story of murder from the pen of Dorothy L. Sayers is always a welcome treat for the reader who likes his mayhem subtle and well done and well written. Neither time nor the change in story techniques can date this great writer's stories, and generations to come will enjoy her tales of crime as much as they are relished by today's most discriminating readers.

From HANGMAN'S HOLIDAY, Copyright 1933 by Dorothy L. Sayers.

afternoon, it quite took my breath away."

"There's that, of course," admitted Mr. Spiller. It occurred to him, not for the first time, that there was something very attractive about Mrs. Digby's personality. She had distinction too. A widow and widower at the sensible time of life, with a bit of money on both sides, might do worse than settle down comfortably in a pleasant house with half an acre of garden and a bit of ornamental water.

"And it's so pretty and secluded," went on Mrs. Digby, "with these glorious rhododendrons. Look how pretty they are, sprayed with the water. Like fairy jewels. And the rustic seat against those dark cypresses at the back are really Italian. Oh, the scent of the lilac is so marvellous!"

Mr. Spiller knew that the cypresses were, in fact, yews, but he did not correct her. A little ignorance was becoming in a woman. He glanced from the cotoneasters at one side of the fountain to the rhododendrons on the other, their rainbow flower-trusses sparkling with diamond drops.

"I wasn't thinking of touching the rhododendrons or the cotoneasters," he said, "I only thought of cutting through that great hedge of lilac, to make a vista from the house. But the ladies must have the last word, mustn't they—er—Ronald?" (He never could bring out Proudfoot's Christian name naturally.) "If you like it as it is, Mrs. Digby, that settles it. The lilacs shall stay."

"It's so sweet of you," said Mrs. Digby. "But you mustn't think of altering your plans for me. I haven't any right to interfere with your beautiful garden."

"Indeed you have," said Mr. Spiller. "I defer to your taste entirely. You have spoken for the lilacs and henceforth they are sacred."

"I shall be afraid to give an opinion on anything after that," said Mrs. Digby, laughing. "But whatever you decide to do, I'm sure it will be lovely. It was a marvelous idea, putting the fountain there."

Mr. Spiller thought she was right. It was exaggerating a bit to call the fountain "ornamental" water, consisting as it did of a marble basin set in the center of a pool about four feet square. But it did make a brave show with its plume of dancing water, fifteen feet high, towering over the smaller shrubs and almost overtopping the tall lilacs. And its cooling splash and tinkle soothed the ear on this pleasant early summer day.

"Costs a bit to run, doesn't it?" demanded Mr. Gooch. He had been silent up till now, and Mrs. Digby felt that his remark betrayed a rather sordid outlook on life. Indeed, from the first moment of meeting Mr. Gooch,

she had thought him decidedly common and wondered that he should be on such intimate terms with her host.

"No, no!" replied Mr. Spiller. "No, it's not expensive. You see, it uses the same water over and over. Most ingenious. The fountains in Trafalgar Square work on the same principle. Of course, I had to pay a bit to have it put in, but I think it's worth the money."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Digby.

"I always said you were a generous man, Spiller," said Mr. Gooch with his vulgar laugh. "Wish I was in your shoes. A snug spot, this place. Snug."

"I'm not a millionaire," answered Mr. Spiller, rather shortly. "But things might be worse in these times. Of course," he added, more cheerfully, "one has to be careful. I turn the fountain off at night, for instance, to save leakage and waste."

"I'll bet you do, you old miser," said Mr. Gootch, laughing. Mr. Spiller was saved a reply by the sound of a gong in the distance.

"Ah, there's dinner," he announced, with relief in his tone. They wound their way out between the lilacs, up the long crazy pavement, past the herbaceous borders and the two long beds of raw little ticketed roses, to the glorified villa which Mr. Spiller had christened *The Pleasuance*.

It seemed to Mrs. Digby that there was a slightly strained atmosphere about dinner although Betty, pretty as a picture, and obviously in love with Ronald Proudfoot, made a perfectly charming hostess.

The jarring note was Mr. Gooch. He ate noisily, drank far too freely, got on Proudfoot's nerves and behaved to Mr. Spiller with a kind of veiled insolence which was embarrasing and disagreeable to listen to.

She wondered again where he had come from, and why Mr. Spiller put up with him. She knew little about him except that from time to time he turned up on a visit to *The Pleasuance*, usually staying about a month and being, apparently, well supplied with cash. She had an idea that he was some kind of commission agent, though she could not recall any distinct statement on this point.

Mr. Spiller had moved to the village about three years previously, and she had always liked him. Though not in any sense of the word a cultivated man, he was kind, generous and unassuming. And his devotion to Betty was a lovely thing.

Mr. Gooch had started coming out about a year later. Mrs. Digby promised herself that if ever she was in a position to lay down the law at *The Pleasuance*—and she had begun to think matters were tending that way—her influence would be directed to getting rid of Mr. Gooch.

"How about a spot of bridge?" suggested Ronald Proudfoot as coffee was served. It was nice, reflected Mrs. Digby, to have coffee brought in by a manservant. Masters was really a very well-trained butler, though he did combine the office with that of chauffeur. One would be comfortable at *The Pleasuance*. From the dining-room window she could see the neat garage housing the Wolseley saloon on the ground floor, with a room for the chauffeur above it, and topped off by a handsome gilded weather-vane that glittered now in the last rays of the sun.

A good cook, a smart parlor-maid and everything done exactly as one could wish—if she should marry Mr. Spiller. She would be able, for the first time in her life, to afford a personal maid as well. There would be plenty of room in the house, and of course, when Betty was married . . .

Betty, she could see, was not pleased that Ronald had suggested bridge. Bridge is not a game that lends itself to the expression of tender feeling, and it would perhaps have looked better if Ronald had asked Betty out to sit in the lilac-scented dusk under the yew hedge by the fountain.

Mrs. Digby was afraid that Betty was the more in love of the two. But if Ronald wanted a thing he had to have it, of course, and personally Mrs. Digby enjoyed nothing better than a quiet rubber of bridge. Besides, the arrangement had the advantage that it got rid of Mr. Gooch.

"Don't play bridge," Mr. Gooch would say. "Never had time to learn, myself. We didn't play bridge where I was brought up." He repeated the remark now and followed it up with a contemptuous snort directed at Mr. Spiller.

"Never too late to begin," Mr. Spiller said pacifically.

"Not me," retorted Mr. Gooch. "I'm going to have a walk in the garden. Where's Masters? Tell him to take the whiskey and soda down to the fountain. The decanter, tell him, one drink's no good to yours truly." He plunged a thick hand into the box of Coronas on the side-table, took out a handful of cigars and passed out through the French window of the library on to the terrace.

Mr. Spiller rang the bell and gave the order without comment, and presently they saw Masters pad down the long crazy path between the rosebuds and the herbaceous borders, bearing the whiskey and soda on a tray.

The other four played bridge until ten-thirty. Then, a rubber coming to an end, Mrs. Digby rose and said it was time she went home. Her host gallantly offered to accompany her. "These two young people can look after themselves for a moment," he added with a conspiratorial smile.

"The young can look after

themselves better than the old these days." She laughed a little shyly, and raised no objection when Mr. Spiller drew her hand through his arm as they walked the couple of hundred yards to her cottage.

She pondered whether to ask him in, but decided that a sweet decorum suited her style best. So she stretched out a soft, beringed hand to him over the top of the little white gate. He pressed the slim fingers, would have kissed the hand, so insidious was the scent of the red and white hawthorns in her trim garden, but before he had summoned up courage, she withdrew it from his clasp and was gone.

Mr. Spiller, opening his own front door a few moments later, encountered Masters.

"Where's everybody, Masters?"

"Mr. Proudfoot left five or ten minutes since, sir, and Miss Elizabeth has retired."

"Oh!" Mr. Spiller was a little startled. The new generation, he thought sadly, did not make love like the old. He hoped there was nothing wrong. Another irritating thought presented itself.

"Has Mr. Gooch come in?"

"I don't know, sir. Shall I go and see?"

"No. Never mind." If Gooch had been soaking up whiskey since dinner-time it was just as well Masters kept away from him. You never knew. Masters was one of these soft-spoken beggars, but he might take advantage. Better not trust servants too far.

"You go along to bed. I'll lock up."

"Very good, sir."

"Oh, by the way, is the fountain turned off?"

"Yes, sir. I turned it off myself, at half-past ten, seeing that you were engaged, sir."

"Quite right. Good-night, Masters."

"Good-night, sir."

He heard the man go out the back door and cross the paved court to the garage. Thoughtfully, he bolted both doors and returned to the library. The whiskey decanter was not in its usual place. No doubt it was still with Gooch in the garden. He mixed himself a small brandy and soda and drank it. He supposed he must now face the tiresome business of getting Gooch up to bed.

Then, suddenly he realized that the encounter would take place here and not in the garden. Gooch was coming up through the French window. He was drunk, but not, Mr. Spiller observed with relief, incapably so.

"Well?" said Gooch.

"Well?" retorted Mr. Spiller.

"Had a good time with the accommodating widow, eh? Lucky old hound, aren't you? Fallen soft in your old age, eh?"

"There, that'll do," said Mr. Spiller.

"Oh, will it? That's good. That's rich. That'll do, eh? Think I'm

Masters, talking to me like that?" Mr. Gooch gave a thick chuckle. "Well, I'm not Masters, I'm *master* here. Get that into your head. I'm master and you damn well know it."

"All right," replied Mr. Spiller meekly. "But buzz off to bed now, there's a good fellow. It's getting late and I'm tired."

"You'll be tireder before I've done with you." Mr. Gooch thrust both hands into his pockets and stood, a bulky and threatening figure, swaying rather dangerously. "I'm short of cash," he added. "Had a bad week. Cleaned me out. Time you gave me more."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Spiller, indignantly. "I pay you the allowance as we agreed, and let you come and stay here whenever you like. That's all you get from me."

"Oh, is it? Getting a bit arrogant, aren't you, Number Bleeding four-one-three-two?"

"Hush!" said Mr. Spiller, glancing hastily round as though the furniture had ears.

"Hush! Hush!" repeated Mr. Gooch mockingly. "You're in a good position to dictate terms, aren't you, four-one-three-two? Hush! The servants might hear! Betty might hear! Betty's young man might hear. Hah! Betty's young man—he'd be particularly pleased to know her father was an escaped jailbird wouldn't he? One that's liable at any moment to be hauled back to work out his ten years' hard labor for forgery?

"And when I think," added Mr. Gooch, "that a man like me, only in for a short stretch and worked it out good and proper, is dependent on the charity of my dear friend four-one-three-two, who is rolling in wealth—"

"I'm *not* rolling in wealth, Sam," said Mr. Spiller, "and you know darn well I'm not. But I don't want any trouble. I'll do what I can, if you'll promise faithfully this time that you won't ask for any more big sums. My income won't stand it."

"Oh, I'll promise that all right," agreed Mr. Gooch cheerfully. "You give me five thousand and we'll call it square."

Mr. Spiller uttered a strangled cry.

"Five thousand? How do you suppose I'm to lay hands on five thousand all at once? Don't be an idiot, Sam. I'll give you a check for five hundred."

"Five thousand," insisted Mr. Gooch, "or I talk."

"But I haven't got it!" cried Mr. Spiller.

"Then you'd better find it," returned Mr. Gooch.

"How do you expect me to find it?"

"That's your problem. You oughtn't to be so damned extravagant. Spending good money that you ought to be giving to *me,* on fountains and gardens. It's no good kicking, Mr. Respectable four-one-three-two, I'm the man on top and you're in trouble, if

you don't take care of me. See?"

Mr. Spiller did not realize that he had struck so hard. He hardly realized that he had struck at all. He thought he had aimed a blow, and that Gooch had dodged it and tripped over the leg of the occasional table. But he was not very clear in his mind, except on one point. Gooch was dead.

He had not fainted; he was not stunned. He was dead. He must have hit the brass curb of the fire fender as he fell. There was no blood but Mr. Spiller, his hand exploring the inert head, shuddered. The police would probably take his fingerprints, and would be surprised to recognize a bunch of old friends.

Masters had heard him say that he would wait up for Gooch. Masters knew that everybody else had gone to bed. Masters would undoubtedly guess that something irregular had happened.

But could Masters prove that he himself had gone to bed? Yes, probably he could. Somebody would have heard him cross the court and seen the light go up over the garage. One could not hope to throw suspicion on Masters. Besides, the man didn't deserve that. But the mere idea had started Mr. Spiller's brain on a new and attractive line of thought.

What he really wanted was an alibi. If he could only confuse the police as to the time at which Gooch had died. If Gooch could be made to seem alive after he was dead, somehow—

He thought back over stories he had read dealing with this very matter . . . You dressed up as the dead man, impersonated him . . . You telephoned in his name . . . In the hearing of the butler, you spoke to the dead as though he were alive . . . You made a gramaphone record of his voice and played it . . . You hid the body, and then sent a forged letter from some distant place . . .

He paused. Forgery . . . but he did not want to start that old game all over again. And all these other ideas were too elaborate, or else impracticable at that time of the night.

Then it came to him suddenly that he was a fool. Gooch must not be made to live later, but to die earlier! He should die *before* ten-thirty, at the time when Mr. Spiller, under the eyes of three observers, had been playing bridge.

So far the idea was sound, and even in its broad outline, obvious. But now for the detail. How could he establish the time? Had anything happened at ten-thirty?

He helped himself to another drink. Then, quite suddenly, as though lit by a floodlight, he saw his whole plan, picked out vividly, complete, with every joint and angle clear-cut.

He glanced at his watch; the hands stood at twenty minutes

past eleven. He had the night before him.

He fetched an electric torch from the hall and stepped boldly out of the French window. Close beside it, against the wall of the house, were two taps, one ending in a nozzle for the garden hose, the other controlling the fountain at the bottom of the garden. This latter he turned on. Then, without troubling to muffle his footsteps, he followed the crazy-paved path down to the lilac hedge, and round by the bed of cotoneasters.

The sky was now very dark, and he could not see the tall column of pale water above the dark shrubbery, but he heard its comforting splash and ripple. And as he stepped upon the surrounding grass, he felt the spray upon his face. The beam of the torch showed him the garden seat beneath the yews, and the tray, as he had expected, standing upon it.

The whiskey decanter was about half full. He emptied the greater part of its contents into the fountain, wrapping the neck of the decanter in his handkerchief so as to leave no fingerprints. Then, returning to the other side of the lilacs, he satisfied himself that the spray of the fountain was invisible from house or garden.

The next part of the job he did not enjoy. It was risky. He wanted it to be heard, but it was a risk. He licked his dry lips and called the dead man by name: "Gooch! Gooch!"

No answer, except the splash of the fountain, sounding to his anxious ear abnormally loud in the stillness. He glanced round, almost as though he expected the corpse to stalk awfully out upon him from the darkness, its head hanging and its dark mouth dropping open to show the pale gleam of its dentures. Then, pulling himself together, he walked briskly back up the path and, when he reached the house again, listened. There was no movement, no sound but the ticking of the clock. He shut the library door gently. From now on there must be no noise.

There was a pair of galoshes in the cloak-room near the pantry. He put them on and slipped like a shadow through the French window again; then around the house and into the courtyard. He glanced up at the garage; there was no light in the upper storey and he breathed a sigh of relief, for that meant Masters was asleep.

Groping his way to an outhouse, he switched the torch on. His wife had been an invalid for some years before her death, and he had brought her wheelchair with him to *The Pleasaunce,* having a sentimental reluctance to sell the thing. He was thankful for that, now; thankful too that he had purchased it from a good maker and that it ran so lightly and silently on its pneumatic tires. He found the bicycle pump and

blew the tires up hard and, for further precaution administered a drop of oil here and there. Then, with infinite care, he wheeled the chair around to the library window. How fortunate that he had put down stone flags and crazy paving everywhere, so that no wheel-tracks could show

The job of getting the body through the window and into the chair winded him. Gooch had been a heavy man, and he himself was not in good training. But it was done at last. Resisting the impulse to run, he pushed his burden gently and steadily along the narrow strip of paving. He could not see very well, and he was afraid to flash his torch.

A slip off the path into the herbaceous border would be fatal; he set his teeth and kept his gaze fixed steadily ahead of him. He felt that if he looked back at the house he would see the upper windows thronged with staring white faces. The impulse to turn his head was almost irresistible, but he determined that he would not turn it.

Finally he was behind the lilacs and hidden from the house. The sweat was running down his face and the most ticklish part of his task was still to do. He must carry the body over the plot of lawn. No wheel-marks or heel-marks or signs of dragging must be left for the police to see. He braced himself for the effort.

It was done. The corpse of Gooch lay there by the fountain, the bruise upon the temple carefully adjusted upon the sharp stone edge of the pool, one hand dragging in the water, the limbs disposed as naturally as possible, to look as though the man had stumbled and fallen. Over it, from head to foot, the water of the fountain sprayed, swaying and bending in the night wind.

Mr. Spiller looked upon his work and saw that it was good. The journey back with the lightened chair was easy. When he had returned the vehicle to the out-house and passed for the last time through the library window, he felt as though the burden of years had been rolled from his back.

His back. He had remembered to take off his dinner-jacket while stooping in the spray of the fountain, and only his shirt was drenched. That he could dispose of in the linen-basket, but the seat of his trousers gave him some uneasiness. He mopped at himself as best he could with his handkerchief.

Then he made his calculations. If he left the fountain to play for an hour or so it would, he thought, produce the desired effect. Controlling his devouring impatience, he sat down and mixed himself a final brandy.

At one o'clock he rose, turned off the fountain, shut the library window with no more and no less than the usual noise and

force, and went with firm footsteps up to bed.

Inspector Frampton was, to Mr. Spiller's delight, a highly intelligent officer. He picked up the clues thrown to him with the eagerness of a trained terrier. The dead man was last seen alive by Masters after dinner, about eight-thirty. After which, the rest of the party had played bridge together until ten-thirty.

Mr. Spiller had then gone out with Mrs. Digby. Just after he left, Masters had turned off the fountain. Mr. Proudfoot had left at ten-forty and Miss Spiller and the maids had been retired. Mr. Spiller had come in again at ten-forty-five or ten-fifty and inquired for Mr. Gooch. After this, Masters had gone across to the garage, leaving Mr. Spiller to lock up.

Later on Mr. Spiller had gone down the garden to look for Mr. Gooch. He had gone no farther than the lilac hedge, and there calling to him and getting no answer, had concluded that his guest had already come in and gone to bed. The housemaid said she had heard him calling Mr. Gooch. She placed this episode at half-past eleven, certainly not later. Mr. Spiller had subsequently sat up reading in the library until one o'clock, then had shut the window and gone to bed also.

The body, when found by the gardener at six-thirty a.m. was still wet with the spray from the fountain, which had also soaked the grass beneath it. Since the fountain had been turned off at ten-thirty this meant that Gooch must have lain there for an appreciable period before that. In view of the large quantity of whiskey that he had drunk, it seemed probable that he had had a heart-attack, or had drunkenly stumbled, and, in falling, had struck his head on the edge of the pool. All these considerations fixed the time of death at from nine-thirty to ten o'clock, an opinion with which the doctor, though declining to commit himself within an hour or so, concurred, and the coroner entered a verdict of accidental death.

Only the man who has been for years the helpless victim of blackmail could fully appreciate Mr. Spiller's feelings. Compunction played no part in them. The relief was far too great. To be rid of the daily irritation of Gooch's presence, of his insatiable demands for money, of the perpetual menace of his drunken malice, these boons were well worth a murder.

And, Mr. Spiller insisted to himself as he sat musing on the rustic seat by the fountain, that it had not really been murder. He determined to call on Mrs. Digby that afternoon. He could ask her to marry him now without haunting fear of the future. The scent of the lilac was intoxicating.

"Excuse me, sir," said Masters.

Mr. Spiller withdrawing his meditative gaze from the spouting water, looked inquiringly at the butler, who stood in a respectful attitude beside him.

"If it is convenient to you, sir, I should like to have my bedroom changed. I should wish to sleep in the house."

"Oh?" said Mr. Spiller. "Why, Masters?"

"I am a light sleeper, sir, and I find the creaking of the weather-vane very disturbing."

"It creaks, does it?"

"Yes, sir. On the night that Mr. Gooch sustained his unfortunate accident, sir, the wind changed at a quarter past eleven. The creaking woke me out of my first sleep, sir, and disturbed me very much."

A coldness gripped Mr. Spiller at the pit of his stomach. Master's eyes reminded him suddenly of Gooch's. He had never noticed the resemblance before.

"It's a curious thing, sir, but the *Times'* weather record reported that the wind shifted at eleven-fifteen the night of Mr. Gooch's—er—accident. Up till eleven-fifteen, the spray was falling on the *other* side, sir, *away* from where his body lay. That would make it appear that the body had been placed in position before eleven-fifteen, sir, and the fountain turned on again."

"Very strange," said Mr. Spiller.

On the other side of the lilac hedge, he heard the voices of Betty and Ronald Proudfoot, as they paced to and fro between the herbaceous borders. They seemed to be happy together. The whole house seemed happier now that Gooch was gone.

"Very strange, indeed, sir. I may add that, after hearing the inspector's observations, I took the precaution of drying your dress-trousers in the linen-cupboard in the bathroom."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Spiller. "Thank you."

"I shall not, of course, mention the change of wind to the authorities, sir. And now that the inquest is over it is not likely to occur to anybody, unless their attention should be drawn to it. I think, sir, all things being taken into consideration, you might find it worth your while to retain me permanently in your service at, shall we say, double my present wage —to begin with?"

Mr. Spiller opened his mouth to say, "Go to hell," but his voice failed him. He bowed his head.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said Masters and withdrew on silent feet.

Mr. Spiller looked at the fountain, with its tall spray of water wavering and bending in the wind, like a puppet on a string . . .

"Ingenious," he muttered automatically, "and it costs nothing to run. It uses the same water over and over again."

a chair for a lady

by . . . William Fay

Alas poor Herbie—who found his affianced bride, scantily clad, in the burlesque show he raided.

HERBIE DELEHANTY sat in the comfort of his bathtub, regarding his stomach, into which some weeks before a criminal named Linky Belvedere had fired a pistol shot. It had proved a superficial wound—but it was by grace of Providence alone that Linky, desperate, hating, cornered, firing bullets all the time, had done no more than singe this lower profile, leaving Herbie with the strength and will to swing a chair about the battleground at many people's heads so valiantly and well that none but Linky had escaped.

Wounded, trapped, betrayed—his hot and empty gun no longer speaking for the law it represented, Delehanty stood alone against the snarling, hitherto unchallenged executioners of Murder, Associated . . .

That's what the papers said. That was the paragraph Herbie liked best. He did it with a chair —one chair. He got them all but Linky and he then resolved there would come a time for Linky too. And since the incident the chair —"Exhibit F" at the indictment and the trial—had, by the court's indulgence, gone to Herbie as an awkward wooden souvenir.

There is an affinity between comedy and cops that goes back, far beyond Officer Pup to the legal myrmidons of Ancient Greece, which William Fay has here exploited in highly diverting fashion. While laughing it's well to remember that in real life bullets don't come from blank cartridges.

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Herbie stood up in the tub and chose a towel from the rack. He placed the towel behind his back and held the ends of it. He pumped his arms. As he pumped he sang a little bit of *I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl Who Mahreed Dear Ol' Dad.*

He had the girl. At least he'd have her soon. Just take a little time, that's all. Formalities and things. He hadn't seen her now in five long years, since she'd been living in Chicago, working there. They might even have been married then, five years ago, before she'd gone away, except—well, Herbie didn't have the dough.

Just on the job, just new, two thousand bucks a year, he had to make those payments on the car. But now? First-Grade Detective now. Four thousand every year. A pretty penny. Very nice. Enough for Gracie and him.

He walked into the bedroom where he sat upon the chair with which he'd brained so many of the criminal elect. It was an ordinary kitchen chair, with shaky legs that hadn't glued into the seat so well the second time. Its pale green paint was badly chipped. It owned no pretty quality beyond the ribbon that the boys had tied to it.

He sat on the chair and thought of Linky Belvedere, and how, by every right, one of their lives should shortly end. But then he thought of Gracie, who was back in town, and how things soon would be the way they used to be.

Gracie didn't phone until he was almost dressed. "Hello, Herbie," she said and listened for awhile. "I've been so busy," she said. "This is the first chance, really, that I've had to phone. I got a job the first thing Saturday —no, Herbie, I'm not dancing. You cured me of that—don't worry. Oh, but Herbie, I'm so *proud* of you! I've kept all the clippings, *every one!* I've read them seven times at least. You're sure you're all right? No bad effects? It's healed? Well, good. I said a prayer. You bet I did.

"Dinner? Herbie, I'd just love to. Certainly I would—be thrilled but not tonight. Would tomorrow be all right? Say eight o'clock. I have to steal the time from work. I'll call you first, then you can pick me up at my place," Gracie said. She told him where it was. "I just can't wait to see you, Herbie. Well, g'by."

Her voice was warm across the telephone and just the same as though she'd never been away. It all came back to him. Big Gracie, honest, wholesome, trusting in the likes of him, not getting any younger while she trusted.

She'd still be beautiful, he knew. And glamorous enough, though large. Too large to dance upon a stage, where always she reminded him of leaping horses at the police games he had seen. He understood that she was in the millinery business now. But a

wife was what she'd make for him. That was the fine career she'd have. If she were large she'd not be quite so large as he. She'd just be Gracie, his wife.

Herbie arose to waltz around the room. He tried to stop his smiling. He would have to buy a gift for Gracie, something fancy, something fine, something that was dear to him. He paused to think about the type of gift.

The chair! The pale green, chipped and shaky chair that had been photographed a hundred times and published in the papers and the magazines, with Herbie and without him. That was it. The chair—and if she married him he'd get it back. Well, anyway, it would be in the house. He made a silent pledge—the chair, for Gracie, no one else.

Herbie's partner, George, came in the door. George said, "Hoibie, we're here. I got the car downstairs."

"Coming, coming, coming!"

"Hoibie, what's so funny?"

"Eh? Oh, nothin', George. Not much. You're married anyhow. You wouldn't know. What's new? You hear anything about Linky?"

"Nothin'. You'd think the bum was buried in cement. We got to pick up the broad."

"Dimples? You mean her? Again? Look, George, I'm tired of chasing that dame. I don't like her, understand? Don't like the type. We've got nothing on her anyhow. Just because she's Linky's girl? The lawyer gets her out in twenty minutes flat."

"Not this time, he don't. Some of the boys is downstairs in the car. We're gonna close her show —put a padlock on the joint."

"You mean it?" Herbie, while more interested, was doubtful still. "Lookit, George. They cleaned those burlesque shows up years ago, didn't they. You can't walk in an' pinch the dame like that."

"She's been takin' too much clothes off," George said calmly. "The boss says put the pinch on her."

Herbie understood the factors here involved. Miss Dimples Dawning, starring at the Uptown Gaieties, tore the house down seven times a day by taking off a great percentage of the clothes she wore. Herbie hadn't seen the show. He did not go to places of that sort. He had assumed that Dimple's act, like others flourishing about the town, while not a thing of innocence was legal anyhow. Else why would strip-tease be a household word?

"The boss says Dimples goes too far," George said. "The more things she takes off the more people they get in the place. The more people they get in the place the more money she gets. The boss says she's sendin' this dough to Linky. She knows where he is but we can't do a thing with her. What can we do when she is sprung in twenty minutes by that thief she calls her lawyer?

"We got to get her on a definite charge. The boss says we should just sit there until it gets too raw. But you got to be smart about what is too raw. You got to wait until she is careless. Then when we are sure it is too raw we put the lock on, Hoibie. Clamp it tight. We bring in Dimples an' the management. Okay?"

"Okay except that I don't like those burlesque houses, George. And I don't like the job."

George gave him more specifics while they walked down to the car. George drove the car, the type of sedan that detectives use, not marked with the official plates nor lettered with the label of the law upon its sides. Two passengers were in the rear, Detectives Rappaport and Burns. The car moved slowly uptown.

"We got lots of time," George said. "They run one show after another, with maybe a half-hour's intermission."

Herbie's tension grew as they neared the Uptown Gaieties. Not that there was danger in the closing of a burlesque house. You just stepped up and flashed your badge and pushed a lot of guys around and told the girls to put their clothes on. Meanwhile the wagon came around and you just shoved them into that. But this was an enterprise that touched the private life of Linky Belvedere. This was one more step on Herbie's path toward settling old accounts.

George parked the car some distance from the theater. Herbie walked with him along the street. Detectives Rappaport and Burns retained their seats inside the car. They'd wait five minutes there before they started for the Gaieties and getting there, it was agreed, they'd do their best not to betray the nature of their call.

Herbie saw the marquee up ahead. The lights blazed DIMPLES DAWNING. Photographs, life-sized, were on the sidewalk—they were plastered to the face of buildings adjoining—they were strung into the lobby, deep inside, up to the man who took the tickets. People passed outside. Most of them stopped to look and many gave up fifty cents to go inside. The doorman, in a military purple, braided, burdened with the splendor that he wore, was energetic, sweating.

"Oh, it's intimate and naughty, gentlemen—just step inside. The only Dimples Dawning in her Continental Revelations, featuring Dangerous Curves You Don't Meet on the Highway, gentlemen. A new show going on in fifteen minutes. Plus fifty lovely ladies in the Liberty Parade, the gorgeous new number dedicated to the boys in uniform. Step right in, please, right this way!"

Herbie kept his hatbrim down—he felt self-conscious, guilty at the ticket booth. He walked inside with George, who viewed the photographs en route and happily remarked, "You think it's bad?"

They found two seats halfway

down the center aisle and climbed in past a lot of people's knees. The lights were on and Herbie hoped they had not been recognized. A man stood in front of the orchestra pit, jingling change in a pocket of his alpaca coat, holding aloft in his other hand a one-pound box of candy. "Just a quartah of a dollah, gentlemen—the same confection formerly retailing . . ." Someone else was hawking ice cream, peanuts, cigarettes. A man sold photographs. He walked among the customers. ". . . containing beauteeful artistic studies of the human form. Now selling for ten cents in postcard sizes . . ."

The lights went out above the audience. The curtain glowed, then went up. The band was small but very loud. The chorus danced out from the wings, six from each side, and kicked their legs through a routine. Some of them smiled and stanchly did their best. The others didn't care. Some of the girls were pretty, though a lot of them seemed drab. Herbie thought it all looked very much like calisthenics on the stage. A man came out and sang a song into the microphone. The crowd was not impressed by these preliminary things. They suffered through it all to get a look at Dimples Dawning.

Miss Dawning came with much ado. The M.C. said, "The management takes pride . . . !"

She was a handsome and a striking sight in long dark evening gown, the sequins sparkling as she moved with catlike tread across the boards. The pit band played some sort of theme for her. The man on Herbie's right breathed heavily.

Miss Dawning tossed her short blond hair. Her body was as supple as a seal's. She sang a little song—"I'll Love Him Still—Though Prison Bars Deny Me"—quite a sentimental bit and meant for Linky, who was not in anybody's jail. But strangely there was power in the song to wrench large tears from many eyes.

"Look, Hoibie."

Dimples took some clothes off. Customers applauded. Herbie waited anxiously but that was all she took off. She had retired into a wing. Her clients, whistling, stamping, brought her back again and Herbie watched her as she neared the scorching special climax of her act. He started to get up.

George whispered, "Wait! We better see the rest of it!"

Herbie said, "The rest of it be damned!" He stood up and motioned toward the stage. "Siddown! Siddown! Siddown!" Miss Dawning's followers entreated. "Down! Get down in front, ya bum!"

Dimples paused and was confused, her revelations robbed of any mask that motion might have given them. Herbie said, in level voice, "All right, all right, this is

a pinch," and George stood up with him and scrambled toward the aisle. Rappaport and Burns moved into action.

Herbie got up on the stage. The manager appeared. "This isn't Russia," he said. "We won't be persecuted, understand?"

"Lock 'im up," Herbie said to Burns. Dimples swung at him, then ran offstage. Somebody hit him with a box of chocolates. Herbie ran into the wings in search of Dimples Dawning.

He wasn't sure into which door she had disappeared or the direction she had chosen for her flight. The members of the cast were obstacles.

"We don't want the rest of you," he said. They all had clothes on, clothes enough. He chose one door and opened it. Nobody there. He tried another door. A tall girl stood before him, clad but scantily. She was very big and very pale. She screamed.

"Herbie!" was the word she screamed.

"Gracie!"

"Oh!" She ran from him and grabbed a robe. She stood there looking at him. Herbie dropped his eyes. His hands hung motionless.

"Gracie," Herbie said again but it was difficult to speak. This was his girl, his very own, part of the show which in duty he had invaded. *"You!"* he said.

"But, Herbie!"

"You—just like the rest of them, while I'm the fool idealizing you. 'No, Herbie, I'm not dancing anymore,' you say," His tone was sarcastic: "Strip-teasing in a place like this. Just like the rest of them. A public spectacle. And I always thought you were—"

"Herbie, don't you talk to me like that."

"Like—like a cattle show." His injury was deep.

"Get out of here!"

"Don't worry," he said. "I will. Just stay where you are. We're only taking Dimples and the manager."

He closed the door. He stepped out into the confusion and the work awaiting him.

Rappaport held Dimples, trapped in mink and legal bracelets, which she referred to as "these things, an' get them offen me!" She kicked at Rappaport. She had a name for Herbie that no man had ever called him. Herbie merely said, "Let's go."

The judge next day set Dimples free. She had appeared, well-clothed, in her defense, ably represented by her lawyer. On the witness stand she made no small denial of her act nor any show of temper that could be reproved. She only said that Herbie was "a bungling idiot who's had so much publicity he's headline happy!"

Herbie, George, Rappaport and Burns had pressed the charges, telling truthfully the nature of the things they saw—no more, no less. The judge had listened

closely, holding chin in hand and scratching his beard.

He said to Herbie, "Officer, there's little doubt that you're a moral man. For that this court will never censure you. But your conception of the law, your private taste in entertainment, cannot set a precedent for all. Your testimony and the testimony of the other officers merely indicate that Miss Dawning is offering for reasonable prices a type if entertainment that is common to many local night clubs at rates comparatively exorbitant. The case is dismissed."

George said to Herbie, "What'd I tell you? What'd I tell you about jumpin' up so soon? The dame was only half undressed. But no, you just can't wait. Not you. You jump right up. 'The joint is pinched,' you say. Aw, Hoibie, you jammed the whole case up."

Which Herbie realized was true. You are one day a big important man. You are, the next, a bum. First-Grade Detective at four thousand bucks a year. *I should be digging clams,* he thought.

His public shame was truly great though his superiors were kind. The D.A. didn't bleat too much. "Better luck next time," was the word they passed around. But Herbie knew he had failed and that their confidence in him was undermined.

He watched Miss Dimples Dawning leave the courtroom with her friends. Youthful, little, painted, vindicated, proud, you'd scarce believe the things she had called him on the stormy night before. "Back to the harness, bum" was all she said in passing now. Quietly and confidentially the words dropped from the corner of her pretty mouth.

"She wouldn't be talking like that," George said, "if you had just waited."

Herbie walked along, not listening. His thoughts were filled with Gracie, with unhappiness. His girl in the Uptown Gaieties!

Out on the courthouse steps photographers did well with Dimples. Herbie saw her finally get into a cab, saw the cab move off with only Dimples in the rear seat. He lit a cigarette and sadly said to George, "Let's get a beer."

The cab had moved out from the curb, its driver pleased to have acquired this noted ornamental fare. "Just ride me around a bit, Jackson," Dimples said to him. "I'm tired, that's all. Just ride around. Get away from here."

Her gloved hand opened her handbag and separated cigarettes from an enormous roll of currency. She knew how much there was—a lot. The cabbie turned around and said, "I was in show business once. I—"

"You talk too much," she said. "Just push your hack."

The cabby did as he was told. He rode around. She told him finally to stop, then paid him off. She walked with the sidewalk

traffic. She stepped into a drug-store, chose a phone booth, put a nickel in the slot and dialed a number hastily. Her face was tense and tired—her fingers nervous at their work. Someone answered on the second ring.

"Let me talk to him," she said. The someone knew her voice and whom she wished to speak to. Linky Belvedere was next to talk into the phone.

"Hello, darling," Dimples said. "I want to talk quick. No. They threw it out of court. Him? The big bum spoiled his case. He closed the show too soon before the act got ripe enough. He dug his own grave in the court. The judge said he was crazy. Am I what? No, there won't be any show tonight. Your friend fixed that. We open up again tomorrow night. I've got the money, darling, but I don't dare go to your place.

"No, I tell you what I'll do—I'll meet you at a girl friend's place. Lives close to you. You'll only have to go a block or so . . . She's not a girl friend, really. It's just she's always tryin' to reform me. Sort of a good-natured slob. She asks me all the time if I get lonely come around and have a cup of tea. She's in the show. The name is Gracie Healey, on the third floor rear, apartment three-B.

"Yes, I checked all that an' there's another reason why they'd never think that I'd go there. No, never mind, but it would kill you if I told you . . . That's right—it's twenty-two, east. The third floor, B. Be careful, honey!"

Herbie Delehanty sat alone—sad but philosophical, gazing at the chair that had felled all but Linky Belvedere. Eight o'clock had come and gone but Gracie hadn't called. Not that he'd expected she would. Last night's exchange of words and facts dissolved much more than any dinner date. Last night dissolved two lives, two flings at happiness.

Of course, he told himself, they hadn't been engaged. He had no claim upon her private or her business life. He had just assumed that things would be as they had always been. That she should work in burlesque as unbedecked as any milkman's horse, while shocking to his taste and damaging to his pride, did not give him the right to say the things he had.

The way she cried, the size of Gracie's tears, were things not easy to forget. He had no right to wound her with his scorn. The type of work she did for fifty cents a look seemed punishment enough. And with things the way they were, of course—the matrimony plans he had made, the new house, the solid things, the better things of life—were out. But they could be at least—well—friends.

The chair—in his own heart he had promised her the chair. No reason now to welsh because

things hadn't gone the way he'd wished them to. She would be home, unhappy now. No sense to hold the grudge.

He was lonesome—he was sad. He told himself the least that he could do was bring the chair. Sort of a token of farewell. He couldn't walk through the city streets with a kitchen chair in his hands, especially since this chair had had a public life and those who saw him carry it around would certainly believe that he was showing off. However, in his lighter moments of the day before he had figured out a system for the transportation of the treasured chair. A silly sort of notion—just a gag, for laughs.

The legs of the chair were not well glued into the seat. His big hands strained until he had pried them loóse. The back of the chair, the upper part, he also separated from the seat. The rungs, with little trouble, had come separate from the legs.

Then it was possible for Herbie to arrange the separated pieces in a fairly level surface against his back, placing two of the disconnected legs in each hip pocket vertically, so that they bracketed the edgewise seat and the upper structure of the chair. Catch on? And then, with his loose topcoat over all, there really was no startling bulge, except where things collided with his gun.

He then removed his gun from its accustomed place and put it in the inside pocket of his jacket, having no good reason to suspect that he might need it. The wooden corset, thus arranged, gave him a splendid posture, and you never would suspect he had a chair stuck up his back. Except he couldn't think that it was funny now. It was, for him, a melancholy night.

Gracie also sat alone, doing what she could to salvage old silk stockings. Her eyes were damp with recent tears. Her anger and her pride had fought the tears with small success. It was, she thought, just like a thick, unreasoning cop, whose head had blown up larger than his stomach, to condemn the honest efforts of a working girl.

If only he had given her a chance to speak. But no, not him —not Delehanty, big shot, holier-than-thou. And she had saved his clippings, been so proud of him, had dared to hope so much.

Her doorbell rang. The hope swelled big inside of her. She put the stockings down. Could this be Herbie? Come to make amends? She rose and walked across the room to open the door . . .

Linky Belvedere, the rackets man, though not a handsome man, was vain and he'd not venture in the darkest night a dozen feet to keep a rendezvous with sightless mice unless he combed his hair. He labored patiently with comb until he had his marcelled locks just so. The pockets of his suit

contained just eighty cents. It wasn't easy now, with all the boys in jail or stiffly dead, to raise the kind of cash he was accustomed to.

Of course things wouldn't stay this way. He had made his break. He'd get away, he'd start anew, he'd even fix that beefy cop. What time was it? Well, nearly nine o'clock. He looked once more into the mirror, checked details. Dimples always liked the way he dressed. She was all right. She'd have the dough—a lump of it. Good kid, no doubt of that, but where would she be if it hadn't been for him? Where would she get her famous name, her earning power? Where had she got all the fancy clothes she wore if not from him?

He wondered savagely if she were always true to him. Then wondered if he knew what he would do if he learned she wasn't. He didn't like this hiding out—these empty sardine cans, the cracker crumbs, the dollar pint of rye upon the bureau, the smell of things about him, any more than he liked Herbie Delehanty, guardian of the law.

He put his black fedora on and turned the brim down nattily along the right side of his head. He checked his gun and felt the reassuring weight of it in his hand. He stepped out of his room into a dark, deserted hall. He closed the door behind him . . .

Gracie opened the door and Dimples Dawning said, "Hello. Are you so surprised? It's just that I was walking by. You mind if I come in?"

"No. Of course. Come in. I—I'm glad you took my invitation. Take off your things. Relax."

"Are you alone?"

"Why, yes." *And that's my trouble,* Gracie thought, *I'm all alone.* She was surprised that Dimples had appeared, though it affirmed her strong belief that there was good in everyone. This kid was simply troubled, tired, spent and twisted by her love for Linky Belvedere. But she could be reclaimed. Then she noted Dimples' nervousness, her eyes, the new and artificial tone of voice, the effort to be casual.

Dimples stretched her lovely and expensive legs. "Well, how about a cup of tea?"

"That's right—I promised you. Just wait'll I shove the bed into the wall." She raised the folding bed back into place. "The only thing that's big enough to spread my sewing on," she said.

Meanwhile Linky Belvedere moved from the dim light of the brownstone's vestibule into the quiet street. A woman and two kids walked on the other side but paid no heed to him. Many cars, their lights turned off, were parked along the street. Two taxis hastened past him in a hurry for the green light at the far end of the street.

Linky felt that it was safe

enough. He walked a quarter of a block, then turned, unseen, into the basement of a large apartment house from which, with little cunning, he was able to emerge into the darkness of the yard it shared with an apartment facing on the street below, where Gracie lived.

Thus, moving carefully, he did emerge and walk along the proper street in search of number twenty-two. He knew where it must be. He slowed his steps at sight of a large man coming the other way. The sweat rolled out of him. His hand jerked quickly toward his hip, but he restrained the hand. He could be wrong.

He saw the man walk up the steps of number twenty-two. The light was not sufficient where the big man walked. He couldn't tell, from where he was, but his stomach crawled, and his legs, unsteady, had a tendency toward flight. Then he calmed himself and laughed away the fear. He knew that Dimples wouldn't sell him out. If she had sold him out, the only thing that he could ask for would be an opportunity to kill her and the cop with the same gun. He waited several seconds, then warily approached . . .

Herbie pressed the downstairs button where it said 3B. The door responded with its buzzing sound and opened when he pressed against it. Herbie walked all right, though stiffly, with the chair inside his coat. The legs of it probed deeply in his rolling hips as he climbed up the stairs. There was a heavy smell of cooking in the house—the stairs creaked under Herbie's weight. He didn't think it was the sort of place he'd choose for Gracie. But then again you never knew—some people's tastes were strange, their occupations worse.

He climbed the second flight of stairs, the chair legs still impeding him. She'd think that he was crazy. Well, he was. So what of that? 3B—the first door to the left. He knocked. He heard somebody say, "I'll answer it. Forgot to tell you I expected company."

Dimples Dawning stood in front of him. He looked at her. She gaped at him, the cigarette hung loosely from her mouth. "Well, this is lovely," Herbie said. "All we need now for a burlesque show is music an' those bum comedians. What time's the show?" He looked at Gracie, standing there.

"Dimples just stopped in for a little chat," she said.

"How nice—how nice! I should've brought the D.A. too. You'd better give this kid a shot of something strong," he said to Gracie. "Otherwise she's gonna faint. What's the matter? What—"

Then Gracie screamed and Herbie whirled around. Linky Belvedere had stepped in through the door, automatic pistol in his hand. His hand was shaking visibly. His face was white. His

eyes did not belong in any man —nor even in a rabbit, stuffed.

Herbie couldn't move. His own gun pressed its hardness against his chest while he stood breathing there. It lay quite inaccessible beneath two layers of coats. The coats were buttoned tidily. Dimples tried to speak but words would not come out. Her mouth hung open loosely when she fainted.

Linky fired two shots at her. He was a madman, little else. Herbie, with no choice of other action, leaped across the room, away from the fire and the sound of the gun, deliberately knocking Gracie to the floor and grasping as a shield the table she had set for tea. Linky fired into the table once. Herbie, holding it, could not get at his gun.

He threw the table at Linky's arm. Linky stepped aside. The table hit a wall. Linky's lips were trembling and the gun was in his hand with three shots left. Herbie stood exposed to it, his topcoat fouled and twisted in the portable parts of kitchen chair that cluttered up his back, his own gun on the floor, dislodged by his violent acrobatics.

Linky stepped around the troubled scene and took his time. He aimed the gun at Herbie, disregarded Gracie. He squeezed the grip and trigger of the gun.

Gracie swung a vast amount of vivid merchandise at him. There was a blur, the sound of the deflected shots. Herbie rushed the little man and drove him to the floor. Herbie felt a warm pang in his stomach.

Linky scratched at Herbie's face and tore the flesh. Herbie punched at him with not too great effect. Herbie reached around and found a strong leg of the kitchen chair that had come loose beneath his coats. He swung it several times at Linky's head. That was enough. Herbie lay there for awhile and then got up. He took his coats off, shed the last two sticks of lumber that still clung to him.

Gracie ran to him and threw her arms about him. "Herbie, darling! You've been shot!"

"Like the last time," Herbie said. "This bum, on horseback with the gun held at the horse's ear, would only make a superficial wound. This time I got a powder burn."

"He's dead."

"No, he's not dead. That's Linky's natural color. She's not dead either. She's wounded in the arm. Call an ambulance."

Gracie went to the telephone in the hall outside and called for an ambulance. Herbie showed the accumulating neighbors his official badge. He phoned the station house. He followed Gracie back into the room and closed the door.

"Nice company you keep."

"Don't be so stupid," Gracie said. "I—I was only trying to help her, straighten her out. I didn't

know she'd have him up here."

"You've got a sweet and sentimental soul. You're all right, Gracie. Yes, you are. You conked him with that thing. You spoiled his aim. That was a—what was that, a flag?" They had placed Dimples on the folding bed which Gracie pulled down from its place against the wall. He walked across the room and picked a striped and spangled article from where it lay. "Looks like a flag," he said. He tried to figure what it was.

"It's a dress—it's not a flag."

"A dress?"

"With stars and stripes. I wear it in the show. I took it home to mend it. I—don't look at me like that, you idiot, you . . ." Gracie's eyes produced big tears.

"You mean you don't walk around the Uptown Gaieties, like —like one of those dames on a calendar?" He held the dress and studied it. "This thing is big enough for me. It's—"

"It's exactly what I wear at all times on the stage in the Liberty Parade—and that's the only time that I appear, because—well, just because I'm big and stand up there like the Statue of Liberty."

"And beautiful," he said.

"And because I need the fifty dollars they pay me every week to open up my millinery shop. I couldn't tell you on the phone that I was working there. And if you hadn't barged right in last night, when I was getting ready for the act. Oh, Herbie!"

He held her very close to him until the ambulance and cops arrived. Then they were gone and Herbie had a bandage on his powder burn. The two of them sat on the folding bed and Herbie put together all the pieces of the chair.

"Needs glue," he said, "an' the ribbon's gone. I had it up my back. Like this. I couldn't bend. I couldn't even walk so well. I was bringin' it to you, because—well, baby, it's a precious little chair."

"You're crazy," Gracie said.

"I know, I know, I know."

"You're sweet besides."

"I want that you should marry me. I got a lot of dough."

"Get off the bed. Don't stare at me like that . . . Oh, Herbie!"

the perfect accident

by . . . Milward Kennedy

When his path crossed that of a girl he learned that the careful plans of murder-minded men can sometimes come to a strange end.

IT IS HARDER than you might suppose to commit a murder, assuming that you don't propose to be caught. One difficulty is interference by third parties. Which is something I failed to take into consideration . . .

I met the girl in the general store where I'd gone to buy a weed-killer. One can always use a weed-killer in the country, and I had a feeling that it would be sensible to have a good supply, just in case I needed it for other purposes, too.

I probably wouldn't have noticed the girl if I had not heard her asking, in a matter-of-fact way, for a brand of 12-bore cartridges that you couldn't hope to buy at Hambleton's. So I looked at her.

She was certainly worth looking at. All the words used to describe the movie sirens—glamorous, sultry, and so forth—fitted her. She almost took my mind off my business.

I had made it my business to rid the world of Edward Nantucket. I expect that, thanks to his name, you remember reading about him. He was quite the little hero. He once led a party of four on a dangerous secret mission into Occupied France and was—so he

Many leading criminologists insist there is no such thing as a perfect crime. After reading this new story we wonder if you'll agree with them.

said, and everyone believed—the only survivor. Robinson, Challenger, de Virac; those were the other names.

They are burnt into my memory. Robinson was my young brother, Teddie, the lad in the family who was to do all the things my game leg won't let me do.

Nantucket was a rich, cosmopolitan, Riviera type who spoke French like a Parisian; a boulevardier, he'd once have been called. Well, he sold out to the Gestapo, that's why he came back and the others didn't. Or didn't quite. Challenger was still alive when France was liberated, if you could still call him alive, poor devil. He managed before he died to whisper his story to an American, and to ask the G. I. to bring it to me. There was nothing I could do, openly or officially, so I decided to take justice into my own hands.

Luck seemed to be on my side. The war over, Nantucket bought himself a showy house only a mile or two away from my humble home.

I was thankful for my name—Robinson was too common to make him think of Teddie in relation to me. But Nantucket was not interested in me. He practically ignored us local folk. We weren't big enough for his boots. And everybody in the village laughed at his efforts to be a countryman, a huntin' and fishin' squire. But the money he spent on guns and gear! And the clumsy way he used them! He was bound to be a joke.

As I was saying, it's not so easy to commit a murder and get away with it. More and more I realized this as I took to hanging around in the woods, watching Nantucket, trying to plan a suspicion-proof "accident." I should want Nantucket—but no one else—to know that it was not an accident. My favorite picture was of him lying smashed by a fallen tree branch, living just long enough to let me whisper in his ear: "Remember Teddie Robinson? He was my brother!"

Nantucket usually did his hunting early in the morning, shooting rabbits and squirrels. He was, of course, practising, trying to make himself a passable shot. So I took to getting up early too, and strolling in the direction where I heard shots. But I was careful. I didn't want to be seen lurking and loitering.

Some fool came and parked a trailer in the corner of a field just off Nantucket's property. That limited my wanderings, for I gave the trailer a wide berth. Still, I did get to know his habits. I learned, for instance, that he usually went home the same way each day.

So we came to Nantucket's last day. Bright and early, it was, but the chill in the air made me glad of a scarf and gloves. I heard a

shot or two down in the woods behind my fields. I went slowly and quietly through the trees. I'd got pretty good at walking as quietly as the Last of the Mohicans over twigs and pine needles, in spite of my game leg.

I soon got onto Nantucket's trail. I picked up one or two of his expensive cartridges, newly fired. But I had still not seen him when I heard what seemed a particularly loud report.

By the direction of the sound Nantucket was on his way home. And that meant he would probably walk under a venerable elm whose branches were ripe to fall without warning. Two mornings running he had taken that exact route. If he took it a third time . . .

I walked in that direction, hurrying as fast as I could. But I did not go fast enough. I did not come in sight of Nantucket. If he'd taken the path he'd used the past two mornings I should have seen him. I swore. I had been counting on "three times lucky."

Then which way had he gone? I pushed on, up the slope towards a point where a stile would bring him onto another footpath that led past his house. This was a point I usually avoided for it was in sight of the trailer, some forty yards or so farther up the slope.

I was so annoyed that I almost forgot to be careful. But I pulled up short for a second or two when I came in sight of the stile. I saw someone—not Nantucket—running down the slope. Then I saw something else and I began to hurry recklessly towards it, too. I finished third.

Nantucket hung over the stile, head downwards, most of the right side of his neck and face shot away, blood dripping down the stile and into the ground.

The girl I'd seen in Hambleton's was standing there, staring at him. She was breathing heavily, her face dead-white, horror in her eyes. She wore a close-fitting, dark-green sweater, a pair of brown slacks. There was a scratch and a smear of blood on her cheek. As I hobbled up she looked slowly from Nantucket to me. Her eyes became intent, almost suspicious.

She must be living in that trailer, I thought to myself, even before I thought about Nantucket. That was the second time she'd taken me that way.

How badly was he hurt? Here was the accident, right enough. If only he wasn't too badly hurt to hear me, yet badly enough for me to make it a fatal accident.

"Nantucket," I whispered. No reaction. I raised my voice. No good. I felt his heart, pulse. Not a quiver. He was dead.

"It *is* Mr. Nantucket, isn't it?" said the girl, her voice shaking.

"Yes. I wonder how it happened?"

"I saw it," she said. "He was climbing over the stile, and his

gun seemed to go off . . ."

I nodded and looked around. A piece of rusty barbed wire wound loosely round the foot of the stile had caught the two triggers of Nantucket's gun. The fool must have been climbing over the stile, with the safety-catch off and the gun held carelessly by the barrel.

I took a closer look—yes, the safety catch was off.

"He's dead," I said. "We'll need to tell the police. Look, if you'll go over to his house—you know where it is?"

She nodded.

"I'll wait here, until the police arrive. You go to his house and call them."

She nodded, started off at a run.

"No need to run," I called after her. "There's nothing to be done for him."

I stared down at Nantucket's dead body and cursed my luck. I took another look at that damned piece of wire that had spoiled my plans. I don't know what made me give the wire a tug, but when I did there was a click. The wire had pulled back one of the triggers!

It didn't make sense. The gun could not possibly be cocked after it had been fired. Or had only one barrel been fired?

Carefully, I broke the gun breech open. Two of Nantucket's special cartridges were in it, recently fired. I slipped them back into the barrels, closed the gun, straightened up and stared at the stile and its burden.

Of course. Now the gun was cocked, but the safety-catch was on. It could only have got the way I'd found it if, after it was last fired, someone had opened it and closed it—thus cocking it; and had then put off the safety-catch.

I stooped again and put off the safety-catch. Now the gun was just exactly as I'd found it.

I climbed carefully past Nantucket's body, over the stile. The hedge was very thick just here, thick and tall and brambly. I thought of green sweater, brown slacks—and a scratched cheek. One could safely have waited, crouched here beside the stile, hidden by the hedge, gun in hand. One could have had a yard or so of old barbed wire ready to fix up when the moment came. As Nantucket climbed over, one could have let him have both barrels in the side of the throat.

And then? Why, fix the barbed wire to account for the accident and—yes, of course: one must make sure there were *two* fired cartridges in Nantucket's gun. If one had been using the right make, the two that were in one's own gun would do. So, open his gun, see to the cartridges, close the breach again, and finally make sure that the safety-catch was off. That girl, of course!

"I saw it," she had said.

I could have wrung her neck! Why the devil did she butt in? She'd done my job for me, staging the accident I'd been trying to plan. But one might easily forget—indeed one might not even know—that by opening the breech of a modern shot-gun one automatically cocked it.

A glorious girl, though. I walked over to the trailer. It was open. I went inside. I only wanted to find two things and I found them both. A box of those cartridges she'd asked for at Hambleton's, the sort Nantucket used. There had been twenty-five in the box, now there were twenty-three. Secondly, an old double-barrel 12-bore shot-gun, with triggers. No automatic cocking there; no wonder she had not thought of that. To me, these things settled it. She'd killed Nantucket. Very well, I'd be neutral, helping neither her nor the police.

And then I made a third discovery. The envelope of a letter sent to the village *poste restante*. It was addressed to Mrs. de Virac.

So I wasn't the only one to whom the American G. I. had told Challenger's story. Apparently de Virac's widow had also been told of Nantucket's treachery.

I walked back to the stile, saw to it that that piece of barbed wire was just as it should be—and pulled the two triggers. Now it was a perfect accident.

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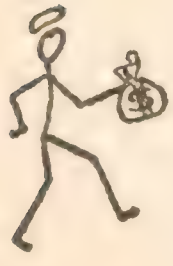

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the painted nail

by . . . George Harmon Coxe

That reluctant medical examiner, Dr. Standish, is forced—against all his baser instincts—to turn simple suicide into messy murder.

THE THURSDAY-NIGHT crowd which had turned out to see *Bright Harvest* in its final week filled the lobby of the Lyceum quickly after the second-act curtain, and Dr. Standish smiled proudly about him as he brought out cigarettes.

There was a fine glow of expansiveness inside him, standing there with Louise Allison, knowing she was his girl. He liked the way people looked at her, the way their glances approved of her cool fragile beauty. For perhaps thirty seconds the glow he felt was warm and bright. Then he saw Barry Beauchamp. So did Louise.

"There's Barry," she said. "Barry, you're not just getting here?"

"Hello," Beauchamp said and grinned. "Had to work late."

He took the girl's hand and held it and Standish, missing nothing, decided sourly that the movies could have cast him, just as he stood, as a successful young advertising man. Which he was. The Beauchamp Studios—Say It with Photographs.

"What a shame," Louise said.

If there are any crime writers anywhere who are more active than George Harmon Coxe, we have yet to meet them. For after conceiving Murdock, the society-photographer-sleuth, he came up with Casey, the low-life shutterbug who has also enjoyed further success in movies, television, and radio. Finally, but not last we'll wager, he dreamed up Dr. Standish to mix murder with medicine.

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"How's the show?" Beauchamp asked. "Any point in seeing the third act?"

Paul Standish didn't hear Louise's reply, for just then he saw a solid-looking man in a blue coat start through the crowd, his glance sweeping the lobby.

Standish turned quickly, his spirits diving. *Oh, no!* he prayed. *Not tonight, Lieutenant. This is my night for fun. I promised Louise.*

Seconds later a hand touched his arm. A quiet voice said, "See you a minute, doc?" And then Standish turned and looked into Lieutenant Ballard's keen gray eyes.

Ballard lifted his hat. "Hello, Miss Allison."

"Now really, Lieutenant!" The girl's voice was annoyed. "Don't tell me you've found another body."

Ballard colored and his voice was embarrassed. "I'm sorry."

Standish sighed. He tried to sound casual. "Be back in a minute, darling," he said, and went with Ballard to the edge of the crowd.

"The James Apartments on Oak Street," Ballard said. "A suicide. A dame. The sergeant says it's cyanide."

Paul Standish stood there a silent moment. Somehow he had known something like this would happen.

"Fine," he said. "Great! Of course you had to find her now."

"You're the acting medical examiner," Ballard said. "We can't move her until you say so."

Louise was waiting with Barry Beauchamp as the lights in the lobby blinked to warn the smokers it was curtain time.

"Look, honey—" Standish began.

"I know," Louise said. "You have to go."

"I won't be long," Standish said. "I'll be back by the time the show is over."

"Say, that's too bad!" Barry said. "Tell you what. Since you're not going to be here, I'll use your seat."

"If we should miss you," Louise said, "we'll be at the Blue Parrot."

The James Apartments was an imposing beige brick building with a lobby switchboard attended by a sallow-faced youth who told Ballard where to go. The apartment he wanted was on the fourth floor, and when Standish followed the lieutenant through the door he was vaguely aware that there were three men in the room. But he saw first the in-a-door bed and the woman who lay there, clad in a slip and a black maribou-trimmed negligée.

A blocky blunt-jawed man sitting on a chair arm said, "Hi, doc."

Standish said hello to Sergeant Kane from Station 5, nodded to a plain-clothes man he did not know. The third man stood up.

"This is Mr. Fielding," Kane said.

Ballard acknowledged the introduction. So did Standish, finding Fielding a stout balding man neatly dressed in a brown Shetland suit that looked imported.

"Mr. Fielding found her," Kane said, "The kid on the switchboard downstairs came up with him and unlocked the door when she didn't answer her phone."

Standish went to the bed, seeing now something familiar about the girl who lay there—a voluptuous girl, tall and well-proportioned. Her hair was red, and he knew that in life she had had the milk-white complexion that so often went with that hair. Now there was a marked cyanosis of the face and neck and on one cheek a faint off-color mark.

"Who was she, Mr. Fielding?" Ballard asked.

"Brenda Delmar," Fielding said. "She was a model for Beauchamp Studios."

Listening to Fielding's story, Standish knew why the girl seemed familiar.

The Beauchamp Studios specialized in advertising photographs and in most of these there was a girl. Not merely in a decorative sense, to glamorize some prosaic product, but as model for a product. For here in Union City were two companies making women's foundation garments and another which made underwear. As a result Beauchamp illustrations and Beauchamp girls could be seen in any women's fashion magazine.

Arthur Fielding managed one of these companies which his wife had inherited — the Nu-Form Company. And Nu-Form was a client of Beauchamp. All of which added up to make the dead girl familiar to Standish. He had seen her with Beauchamp in restaurants and night clubs.

"She used to work in some dress shop here in town," Fielding was saying, "and Beauchamp spotted her and put her to work posing for underwear. She was out to our place several times to model our line."

Paul Standish bent over the dead girl. He was at once aware of the odor of bitter almonds that came from her mouth as he took her head in his hands and moved it gently, testing the *rigor*. He did the same with the arms. Then, as he examined the hands, he saw that on the right one the pointed tip of a red-painted nail had been torn from the middle finger.

He straightened finally and glanced at the glass on the table beside the nail-polishing kit. There was an inch or so of liquid in the glass and he leaned over and sniffed, smelling whiskey and the unmistakable odor of cyanide.

Arthur Fielding was still talking when Standish finished calling the morgue. Brenda Delmar, Fielding explained, had phoned him in the afternoon and said she wanted to see him. She would not

tell him why. He did not know whether she sounded distraught or not. He did know that she was divorcing her husband, a lieutenant in the Army who had returned from overseas the day before.

"I don't know if that had anything to do with it or not," he said. "I told her I'd be late but she said she'd wait. When I came I had the boy downstairs call her. He didn't get any answer but said he was pretty sure she was in, so we came up to see if anything was wrong."

When Fielding left, Sergeant Kane went downstairs to question the youth on the switchboard about the dead girl's husband.

Ballard moved over to the table next to the bed and sniffed the glass. "No doubt about the cyanide, is there?"

Standish shook his head and moved about the room. He noticed then that there was a small kitchen beyond the dinette and when he strolled out there he saw a half-filled bottle of whiskey. When he came back Ballard was looking down at the dead girl.

"A good-looking doll, all right. You going to do a p.m.? When?"

Standish had been thinking about this very thing and the idea was discouraging. For he also thought of Louise Allison enjoying the third act of *Bright Harvest* with Barry Beauchamp—and he found the mental picture distasteful. He looked up at Ballard, scowling, and the door opened and the morgue men came in.

Paul Standish supervised the removal of the body, seeing then the two small red spots on the sheet and, up at the head of the bed, the larger smear. Cataloguing the first two as polish from newly painted nails and the other as lipstick, his mind moved on to other things.

If he left now it would be a cinch to break up the Louise-Barry combination at the Blue Parrot. Here, apparently, was a cut-and-dried suicide with ninety-five per cent of the evidence supporting such a conclusion. All he had to do was sign a certificate as to the cause of death. He was about to say so when something he could not explain stopped him.

There was just one thing that did not satisfy him and only by a post-mortem could he be sure. And then he remembered old Doc Lathrop, who was recuperating in Vermont. He recalled the promise he had given. There was, he knew, an obligation here; not only to Lathrop but to the job and his own self-respect. Maybe with luck he could still make the Blue Parrot before closing time.

"Yeah," he said, "I'll do a p.m. I'll do it tonight."

As it turned out his optimism was unjustified. It was five after two when he drove past the Blue Parrot, to find it dark. Not until he was in bed could he accept philosophically his personal dis-

appointment over his interrupted date and be truly thankful that he had made the right decision. For the autopsy he had performed, with the help of a young interne from City Hospital, had shown conclusively that Brenda Delmar had not died a suicide. She had been murdered.

When Dr. Standish entered his office through the private entrance the next morning Mary Hayward, his newly acquired nurse, was dusting his desk. A slender neatly-made girl with fair skin and hazel eyes, she smiled quickly and gave him a bright, "Good morning."

"Hi, Mary," he said, and as he came round his desk she pointed to the top letter of the pile she had placed there.

"There's one from grandad," she said. "I got one too. Also"—she bobbed her head toward the reception-room door — "Lieutenant Ballard is here."

"Ballard," Standish said, frowning. "Let him wait."

He sat down and picked up the letter. *F. W. Lathrop* had been written in a shaky scrawl in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. Under that, *Cold Springs, Vermont.*

He pried open the envelope and began to read. Time slid swiftly back. It was 1940 again and he was just setting up his office.

It had been tough going that year. The city had not yet filled with war workers and there were plenty of young doctors still unneeded by the Army and the Navy. It was a long time between patients and the worries were piling up when Doc Lathrop, who had known and liked Paul Standish as an interne, suggested that he might like an assistant medical-examiner's job on a fee basis.

"It'll give you an opportunity for research," Lathrop had said "You'll get a chance to know anatomy you couldn't get any other way. You figure you want to be a really competent diagnostician some day? Then maybe this'd be something you'd like."

Standish put in nearly a year with Doc Lathrop before he donned a uniform and went away. He saw the Aleutians and Kwajalein, and after that he spent six months in a hospital — from a mortar shell that came too close. When they sent him home he found Doc Lathrop still at it and the retirement he had worked for all his life relegated to the future.

"Can't quit now," he said. "Hurry up and get your office going, son, and take the strain off the rest of us."

Standish didn't believe it was that bad.

"You think so?" Doc Lathrop said. "Wait'll you see the people pile in. You'll find out."

Lathrop was right as Standish quickly learned. But there were compensations for the pressure of work. He began to have a bank account and he met Louise Alli-

son and presently the future looked very bright indeed. There was only one cloud on his horizon and that concerned Miss Vance, his nurse. She wanted to get into the Army Nurse Corps, and when the months went by and no replacement was found her complaints became insistent.

It had been that way until one night three weeks previously. He and Louise were having dinner at the Parkside when Lieutenant Ballard appeared.

"Miss Vance from your office told me where you were," Ballard said. "A guy's been shot—up on River Street. Doc Lathrop said I should get you. The guy's dead and we can't move him until the doc or one of his boys says so."

"But why, Paul?" Louise said. "I mean, why you?"

"I used to be Lathrop's assistant," he explained. "Is something wrong with Lathrop?"

"Well—he says he's just a little upset," Ballard said. "He says he'll do the p.m. tomorrow all right but tonight he'd appreciate it if you'll help out."

In the end Standish had had to do the autopsy too. For when he called on Lathrop the next morning he found the old man sitting in a chair while Mary Hayward, his granddaughter, hovered about, insisting that he close his office for the day and send his patients elsewhere. Lathrop, a Falstaffian figure with an acid tongue, glowered at Standish when the young doctor concurred.

"She's crazy," Doc Lathrop growled, "and so are you."

Standish grinned and the fact that he was able to bully Lathrop into submitting to a thorough examination was proof enough that the old doc was not up to par physically. In the end Standish said, "You're going fishing. And don't give me any of your lip or I'll advise the Medical Board of your condition."

It was, Doc Lathrop said, all poppycock—and who would be the medical examiner if he went away?

"I will," Standish said. "There's only one condition." He told them about Miss Vance and her desire to be relieved. "Mary," he said, "will have to take Miss Vance's place while you're gone."

"You'll not bully her," Doc Lathrop said, but he saw the brightness in Mary's smile and knew he was whipped.

Standish put the letter back into the envelope. He smiled at Mary Hayward's trim young back and it came to him then that having her here compensated for the additional work.

"All right," he said, sighing. "Tell Ballard to come in."

Lieutenant Ballard glanced approvingly at Mary Hayward. "I didn't get your report on the Delmar woman," he said.

"I haven't made it out yet," Standish said. "I thought I'd better hold it up. It's not suicide."

"You mean somebody gave her that cyanide?"

"Somebody gave it to her—but she didn't drink it."

"But you could smell it on her. There was cyanide in that glass, and—"

"Somebody poured cyanide in her mouth," Standish said, "but by then she was dead. Of asphyxia. She was smothered to death and no cyanide was ingested."

Ballard took another second to examine Paul Standish's bony face, the steady blue eyes.

"That's great," he said disgustedly. "Here I've got a nice clean-cut suicide and you come along and louse it up for me. Now what am I supposed to do?"

"For one thing, I'd get the sheet from that bed." Standish mentioned the two red spots he had seen, the other smudge higher up. "She might have just finished fixing her nails," he said. "But the smudge is lipstick, I think."

"So—"

"Somebody tipped her over, face down, and put a pillow over the back of her head and leaned on it. But before that somebody slapped her face—hard. Maybe it would be a good idea to pick up Brenda Delmar's husband."

It was twelve-thirty when Paul Standish nosed his car into the parking space behind Police Headquarters. He was not sure just why he was stopping in to see Ballard. His job, in so far as Brenda Delmar was concerned, was finished. The law said his duty was to determine cause of death and to ascertain if anyone was culpable. Yet, in this case, he found himself reluctant to dismiss the matter so easily. Some impulse had brought him here and now he went directly to the second-floor hall. He ran into Barry Beauchamp coming out of Lieutenant Ballard's office.

Beauchamp's grin was absent and worry replaced the ready charm he so often displayed.

"Are you the one who said Brenda was murdered?" he said, "What in hell do they mean by getting me down here, questioning me about where I was last night?"

Standish looked him over calmly. "She worked for you, didn't she? You used to run around with her?"

Beauchamp seemed about to speak, thought better of it, and strode down the hall. Standish opened Ballard's door and stepped inside. Ballard was staring out the window.

"I think you hurt Beauchamp's feelings," Standish said.

"Yah!" Ballard fumed. "How do you like a guy getting coy with me about where he was last night—before he went to the Lyceum?"

"Did he tell you?"

"No, damn it! He had a date. He'll tell if he has to, and not until. Phooey! Not that it matters. We got the husband—a lad

named Garvey. And you were right about the dame getting cuffed. By him. He's our boy all right."

Standish sat down. "Figure it for me."

"This Garvey's an infantry lieutenant," Ballard said. "He's back here for thirty days after being two years across, and he wanted Brenda to come back to him. She turned him down the night before last and yesterday he did a lot of drinking and went up there last night for another try. He admits he was pretty drunk, and when she wouldn't play he lost his head and socked her.

"Then he must have smothered her. That probably sobered him enough to make him realize what he'd done, and he covered up by putting poison in a highball. He saw she wasn't marked up because he'd used a pillow and he figured it would look like a suicide. It would have gone down that way too but for you."

"Where'd he get the cyanide?"

"How do I know?" Ballard shrugged. "Where does anybody get cyanide? Maybe he had it with him. Maybe he figured on using it himself; he was drunk enough."

Standish said, "May I see him alone?"

Walter Garvey was a rangy young man with a sinewy neck and big hands that trembled. He sat down at Standish's invitation and the doctor began to talk. It was not difficult for Standish to get the rest of the story.

Walter Garvey had had just two weeks of married life with Brenda Delmar. He had met her at a party and Brenda was young and two years ago she had not been doing so well as a clerk in a dress shop. With his spotless uniform and money in his pockets Garvey had been a persistent suitor, and in the end Brenda was not hard to convince. So they had their two weeks and everything was lovely—until he had gone. As with so many other couples, absence began to work against this marriage which had no solid foundation.

Letters became fewer and more skimpy. Other men appeared on Brenda's horizon. She began to model for Barry Beauchamp and life became more interesting. What had once seemed a lark now loomed as bad judgment and Brenda was not one to carry on for the sake of appearances.

Garvey explained all this in a hurt voice. He told how he had called on Brenda that first night and how he had got drunk the following day and stayed that way until he went back again to her apartment last night.

"She wouldn't go out," he said. "She wouldn't even take a drink with me. She just sat there on the bed, waving her hands to dry that red nail polish."

The rest of the story—how, in his exasperation, he had slapped

her face and rushed from the room—he had already told Ballard and he would not change it now. Standish heard him out. In the end he rose and opened the door.

"There's one thing you might do," he said to Ballard when Garvey had gone. "Send someone up to Brenda Delmar's place and have him go over everything with a vacuum cleaner."

Ballard looked at him. "And what're we looking for?"

"A piece of fingernail."

Ballard did not hesitate long. He eyed Standish speculatively and remembered how the doctor's laboratory work and clear thinking had helped solve other cases. Ballard was not a man to overlook any bets.

"Okay," he said. "I'll let you know."

Louise Allison was waiting at the Parkside, and for a little while Dr. Standish forgot about Brenda Delmar and Walter Garvey and Lieutenant Ballard. It was not until they were waiting for dessert that Louise mentioned the murder of Brenda Delmar.

Standish frowned. "How did you know she was murdered?"

"Barry told me," she said. "He phoned to ask if we were going to the Taylors' for cocktails," she added quickly, seeing his frown deepen. "He said he'd had to go to Police Headquarters."

"She worked for him," Standish said. "He used to go out with her."

"Of course. But that was all over. He told me so." She hesitated, and now some of the softness went out of her eyes. "Look, darling, how much longer are you going to keep on with this medical-examiner work?"

The warm glow that had been inside Standish went away. He had explained why he had to take the job. He thought she understood that, had he not taken it, Doc Lathrop would have hung on until he dropped. Now he saw she did not understand. It was no good explaining.

"Until he comes back," he said. "or until they appoint someone else."

Louise Allison turned the ring on the third finger of her left hand absently. It was a diamond solitaire that had been his mother's. Louise glanced at it, and suddenly she smiled.

"I'm sorry, darling," she said. "I didn't mean to scold, but—"

"Yeah," Standish said, and grinned. "I know." He glanced at his watch and said he had to run.

"Don't forget the Taylors," Louise said. "I'll pick you up between five and five-thirty."

At four-forty that afternoon, after all his office patients had gone, Standish parked his car near the corner occupied by the James Apartments and went down the side street to a ramp that led to the basement garage. There were

a half dozen cars parked in the gloomy cavern and a tall thin Negro appeared from behind one and looked at him.

Standish asked him if he was on duty all day and when did he quit. The fellow told him eight o'clock.

"Any night man on?"

"No night man," the Negro said.

Standish thanked him, walked to the elevator and rode to the main floor. The sallow-faced youth who had been on the switchboard the night before was on duty again. His name, he said, was Albert. He was quite familiar with everyone in the building and he remembered no strangers who had entered the place between nine and ten the night before. Only the fellow who said he was Miss Delmar's husband.

It seemed to Standish then that Albert was telling the truth. Yet he was reluctant to accept it because there was one conclusion he could not escape. Either Walter Garvey was lying or else someone had gone up to Brenda's apartment — through the front door or through the basement garage.

"Do you know Barry Beauchamp?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir," Albert said. "He used to be in and out of here pretty often."

"But not last night."

Albert shook his head.

In the basement again Standish took out a dollar when the Negro approached him. He let the man see it and then asked if he was sure there was never anyone here at night.

"Ain't no one here regular," he said. "Old guy comes sometimes to polish cars. Works as a night watchman down the street and comes in here evenings."

"Was he here last night?"

The man's face lit up. "Come to think of it he was. He was doing a waxing job on Mrs. Waters' car when I left."

Standish passed over the dollar. "What's his name? Know where he lives?"

"Name's Cerroni. Nick Cerroni. Lives over on Fiske Street but I don't recollect the number."

Fiske Street was a narrow two-block-long alley in the mean section of town. In a corner grocery store they told Standish where Nick Cerroni lived. The top floor of No. 118, they said, and presently Standish found it, a shabby wooden tenement.

Once inside he discovered a small hall with a door on the left and stairs mounting straight ahead through a thick gloom that became darkness as he climbed. He felt his way along the second-floor landing and found the last flight of stairs and started up, one hand on the rickety banister.

In the third-floor hall he could vaguely make out a door ahead of him, slightly ajar, and a second door on the left which was closed.

He knocked here, leaning close in order to hear any sound that might come from within. He was like that when it happened.

There may have been some slight rustle that made him glance over his shoulder and in that same instant he saw the figure loom darkly toward him.

Behind it, the door which had been ajar stood open and he sensed rather than saw the object swinging toward him. He half-turned to meet the attack, lurching sideways as he tried to duck. He knew also, in that split instant before the blow fell, that this was the killer, that he had been to see Nick Cerroni, and that even now he might be too late. Then something hard slammed glancingly from his head and smashed against his shoulder.

Off balance now he felt himself start to go down. He swung desperately at the man as he turned, his fist crashing solidly, missing the jaw but, with the weight of his body behind it, staggering the other against the wall as he himself fell.

He hit the floor on one knee and pivoted. Trying to turn he heard the pounding on the stairs, knew that the killer was running down the stairs. He was already on the landing below and Standish swore and started after him and then stopped.

Reason told him something was terribly wrong in Cerroni's room, that this attack on him was not personal but to stop him from entering the flat.

He tried the door and it was locked. He lunged against it and the lock ripped off and he was in a dim warm room that smelled strongly of illuminating gas.

There were two windows with shades pulled low and he snapped them up and threw the windows wide, seeing the man on the floor but stepping to the hot-plate which had been knocked from a table so that the rubber tube was pulled from the nipple in the wall. He turned off the gas and began to work over the man on the floor—a small man, not young.

A sound behind him made him look up. A squat fellow in overalls, holding a broom and evidently the janitor, was staring at him. Standish gave him orders in crisp tones. He told him to phone Police Headquarters, to have Lieutenant Ballard call an ambulance and come at once.

Standish worked automatically, his eyes moving about the poor neat room. There were two pictures on the buffet, one of a youth in a Marine's uniform, the other of a girl dressed as a Wave. Each had some resemblance to the man on the floor and, thinking of this, Standish's anger was a tight hard knot inside him. It was another minute or two before he realized Cerroni was breathing regularly.

He checked pulse and respiration, then he knew that something besides gas had made Cerroni un-

conscious. He told Ballard about it five minutes later.

"Probably chloral hydrate," he said. "They must have had a drink here and Cerroni was handed a Mickey. When he passed out, the killer tipped over the gas-plate to make it seem an accident. We'd have found Cerroni dead of asphyxia."

"You know what would've happened if the guy had laid you out in the hall," Ballard said. "You'd have been dragged in here and we'd've found two of you dead from gas. You sure you didn't get a look at him?"

Standish shook his head.

"But you know who it was?"

"Did you vacuum that room?"

"We did. We got dirt and hair and pins—but no fingernail."

"Then," said Standish, "I guess I know who did it. With a pillow over her head and somebody leaning on it, Brenda Delmar couldn't do much struggling. She tried to reach up and pull the guy off with one hand and she tore off part of a red-painted nail and it must have got caught in the guy's suit.

"Garvey wore a uniform," he said. "It's hard cloth. A fingernail wouldn't catch in it. Beauchamp had a worsted suit when I saw him—a smooth hard finish."

Ballard's brows climbed. "Arthur Fielding!" he exclaimed.

"Fielding wore a Shetland suit last night. A soft loose weave that's worse than a sweater for snagging things."

"Well, come on," Ballard said. "Let's get up there."

"Not me," said Standish. "I'm going to the hospital and make sure they're doing the right thing for Nick Cerroni."

"Okay," Ballard said. "Sure."

"Tell Fielding that Cerroni's going to live. Get that Shetland suit. You ought to find the missing fingernail stuck in it."

When Dr. Standish drove past his office at six-twenty and saw Louise Allison's car parked out front he knew what to expect. But this time he had a good excuse and he told himself that she would understand. He entered his office by the private entrance to find Mary Hayward bent over his desk making out bills.

"I thought that you'd gone," he said.

Mary smiled. "I wanted to get these done," she said and then added, "Miss Allison is waiting for you."

"Yeah," Standish said, and opened the door of his waiting room. "Hello, darling," he said as she rose and smiled at him. "I'm pretty late, I guess."

"I have something for you," she said, and he looked down as she put his mother's ring in his hand. Then, as he stared and something died inside him, she came up on tiptoe and kissed him. "I love you dearly, Paul," she said lightly, "but I'm afraid it just wouldn't work."

He stood quite still, knowing

that at last he had really lost her. He did not know quite what he said but somehow she was at the door and remarking that Barry Beauchamp was waiting in the car.

After awhile he moved to his desk and slumped down in his chair. "I lost my girl," he said.

"I—I heard it," Mary said. "You can get her back."

Standish shook his head. "Not this time, Mary. You see, I don't want her back."

She slipped into the chair where his patients usually sat, her hazel eyes softly troubled. She asked what had happened and he told her about Arthur Fielding and Nick Cerroni, and presently he was talking easily and giving the details and explaining how he saw the motive.

"Mrs. Fielding held the purse-strings," he said. "If she tossed him out he wouldn't have a dime because she owned the business. And I guess he got in too deep with Brenda. I don't know yet if she was blackmailing him or whether she threatened to go to his wife but whatever the reason he had to get rid of her."

"You think he went there last night to poison her and make it look like suicide?" Mary said.

Standish nodded. "He must have had murder in his heart or he wouldn't have gone up through the garage. But he did and then his plan wouldn't work because Brenda didn't want a drink. So he lost his head and it was still murder — but not the way he planned."

He paused, continued slowly, "At that he didn't get panicky. There were no marks on her that he had made and he still had the poison, so he poured a little in her mouth. The trouble was, Nick Cerroni must have seen him leave.

"As long as the death was listed as suicide everything was all right. Murder made it different. Cerroni might talk. Fielding went there this afternoon and the old man probably didn't yet know it was murder and they had a drink and . . ."

"And if you hadn't come when you did," Mary said, "he'd be dead now."

He saw again the two pictures on the buffet and somehow he did not feel so bad. He looked at Mary and saw the warm glow in her cheeks. He thought, *She's lovely and she understands.*

He felt his grin come. All at once, though he did not know why, he felt better. "Hey," he said, "I'm hungry! How about you?"

"Yes," Mary said.

"Then let's eat." Standish rose and pulled her with him. "Get your coat," he said. "A Martini for me and maybe a spot of sherry for you and some food, huh?"

She nodded her head. She didn't say anything but her eyes did, and what Standish saw there was sufficient.

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2 The Case of the MOTH-EATEN MINK

Mason rushes to a hotel and finds the girl the police are looking for. "The man in room 851," she sobs, "wants to KILL me!" Just then the police burst into the room. "Don't move!" they order. "A man has been killed in room 851 — *you're both wanted for MURDER!*"

3 The Case of the ONE-EYED WITNESS

Mason picks up the phone. A voice says: "See Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *Matter of life and death!*" But Carlin never HAD a partner! Yet he's MURDERED!

4 The Case of the ANGRY MOURNER

Belle Adrain, Mason's client, is pale as a ghost. A witness SWEARS he saw her at the scene of the murder. And Exhibit "A" — the *murder* weapon — is Belle's OWN GUN!

5 The Case of the NEGLIGENT NYMPH

Mason sees a girl escaping from George Alder's estate. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do ANYTHING to get this letter!" she says. "You *must* stop him!" But someone else beats Mason to it — *by killing Alder!*

6 The Case of the FIERY FINGERS

Perry's client is on trial for murder. The D.A. flings a package in front of the accused woman. She collapses. The jury is ready to send her to the chair — but Perry comes up with a surprise package of his own!

— Continued on inside cover

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